

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG [PCZONE.CO.UK](http://PCZONE.CO.UK)

# PCZONE

ISSUE 218 APRIL 2010

THE WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW

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VS

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*a jetpack.” - PC Gamer*

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PCZONE

# Contents

In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

## OH GOD, WHY?

**D**ON'T PANIC. PLEASE. Due to a series of administrative errors spanning four years, I've ended up in the editor's seat, spinning around and gurgling like a small child. Weird, eh?

Having been reading the magazine for the best part of a decade and writing for it for almost five years, I'm excited, proud, and deeply shocked to finally be running the thing. Simply, my priority is to not wreck *PC ZONE*, so if you've any ideas or suggestions as to how I might do that (because I don't have a bloody clue), my email address is at the bottom of this string of text.

Otherwise, wahey for games. We've got the very first review of *Aliens vs Predator* in this here issue. I chose to review it myself, because that's the sort of executive decision I can make now, and I found that it was rather good. Rather very good, in fact.

It sits alongside *Mass Effect 2* and *BioShock 2*, both of which attained exceptionally high scores, and makes this month - and I say this without any hyperbole - the greatest month in the history of mankind.

We've also got a load of other things, which we've helpfully splayed across these pages in order to guide you to their allocated pages. Seen something you like? Ah, the *Star Trek Online* feature? Yes, that's good. Well spotted too. You have a good eye for this sort of stuff. Enjoy.

*Steve Hogarty*

Steve Hogarty  
Acting Editor  
steve.hogarty@futurenet.com



# 66

COVER STORY

## ALIENS VS PREDATOR

Toothy aliens, slimey aliens and terrified humans have come back. Can *AvP* match the classics and redeem Rebellion's reputation?



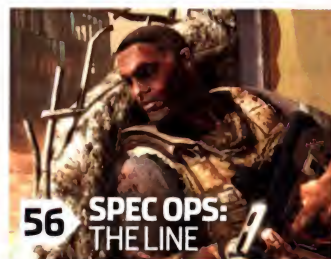
# 78

## BIOSHOCK 2

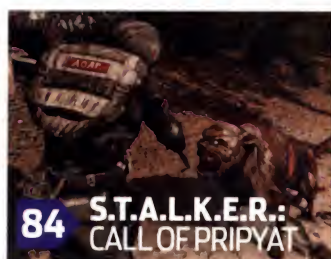
It's Rapture, but just a little bit different. Will it be any better?



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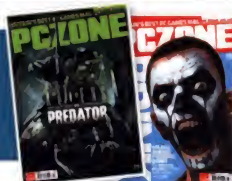


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**ONLINE ZONE**  
THE INTERACTIVE BIT  
OF PC ZONE - BLOGS,  
TWITTERS, AND OUR  
FAMOUS FIGHT  
CLUB!



## 110 FREEWARE

Eight-bit zombie killing,  
starships made of LEGO,  
Mario does *Tetris*, and  
a snake helps out Santa.

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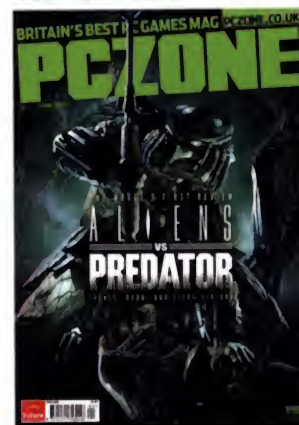
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## WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



### 66 ALIENS VS PREDATOR

**Too busy? PC ZONE in 76 words...**  
After Ali left the building, Steve took over and forced us all to do work. David was pushed out of the door to hang out with some Swedes (the people, not the vegetables), and Log was pulled back in to write words. This meant in this issue we ended up flying through the galaxy, hanging around subterranean Russia, joining the US Army in the Middle East, stomping on mutated infants, and getting our faces hugged repeatedly.





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# Meet The Team

Running the government, but that's a secret. Shhh...



## STEVE HOGARTY

Acting Editor

AGE 22

LIKES Editing

DISLIKES Acting

FANCIES Coffee, alcohol, ProPlus  
and Lucozade

FAVOURITE GAME As always, it's  
Frontier: Elite II

NOW PLAYING Mass Effect

We're not sure how it happened, but when we came back from our Spring break we discovered Steve was in charge of us all. Now some people would have a problem with having a boss so young, but not the PC ZONE team. We all rallied behind our new leader and held him aloft, and promised that we'll never refer to him as "that quiet young Irish lad," again. Instead he shall be known as "that very friendly, intelligent, attractive and personable young Irishman who can fire us on a whim."

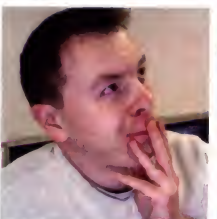


## JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Freelancer 'Snap'

Escaping from the Middle England  
hell that is the Mail on Sunday for a  
week, Log briefly returned to the  
bosom of PC ZONE. Only to be  
rushed away by social workers.

NOW PLAYING: AvP

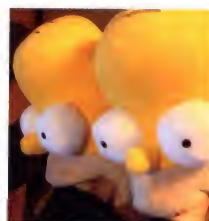


## PAUL PRESLEY

Freelancer 'Crackle'

"I need a superhero!" screamed  
Boss Hogarty. "Get me a superhero  
now!" The team flailed about and  
then told Prezzer to dig out his  
tights and cloak, as he was needed.

NOW PLAYING: Star Trek Online



## DAVID BROWN

Staff writer

David returned from the Christmas  
break full of cheer and warmth  
towards all of humanity. A swift  
blow to the back of the head  
turned him back to normal.

NOW PLAYING: NBA 2K10



## WILL PORTER

Freelancer 'Pop'

"I wrote 16 whole words of  
tonight's episode of Skins," he  
tweeted. Will Mr Porter's next  
stop be Hollywood, or the chilly  
wastes of BioWare's HQ?

NOW PLAYING: BioShock 2



## ADAM GLICK

Freelancer 'Coco Pops'

Missing, presumed dead. Adam's  
copy is being delivered by his  
family's attorney, who claims to be  
looking after Adam's modest  
estate. Get in touch, Adam!

NOW PLAYING: Mass Effect 2



## PHIL WAND

Hardware Expert

"Hah, is that it? Is that the best you  
can do? I spit on thee! Spit I tell  
you!" \*hack-spit\* Let's just say,  
Wandy wasn't impressed when he  
saw the iPad.

NOW PLAYING: Fallen Earth

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... The gradually brightening days, oh vitamin D, how we missed you  
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... The ever-present threat of terrorist attack

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

ALI LEAVING 12min Was it something we said?

APPLE IPAD 33min The iPhone - as designed by Dom Joly.

STEVE AS EDITOR 18min The youngest one here is everyone's boss. How'd that happen?

JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR 7min Let's face it - it wasn't all that great.

THE PHANTOM MENACE YOUTUBE REVIEW 87min Long (70min) and long overdue, but hilarious (snipurl.com/lucas\_fail)

DIRTY DOZEN 2min The age of sexual consent in the Vatican is 12. You decide why.

TRAILERS? STILL? 4min Mass Effect 2 is already out, so quit it with the trailers!

DOCTOR WHO: THE VIDEOGAME 6min Couldn't be worse than the TV show. Could it?

THE GENERAL ELECTION 1min We're already bored with politicians lying at us.

CLICKING HARD DRIVES 2min Just get it sorted out Steve, would you?

## WIN!



HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Corp, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW, or by email to letters@pczone.co.uk (set TINY COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of Ghostbusters: The Video Game. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

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# Letters

Now behind the editor's desk, **Steve Hogarty** sorts through your ramblings



## WIN!



This month the monarch of the Letters pages will receive two prizes: an ATI Radeon HD 5750 graphics card, and a copy of *Colin McRae: DIRT 2*, thanks to our pals at AMD. The HD 5750 is part of a new breed of powerful GPUs that are compatible with DirectX 11. And *DIRT 2* is the perfect game to see what DX11 is really capable of.

## KING OF LETTERS

### TALKING GAMES

To test out voice recognition I am composing this email with Windows 7's voice recognition software. At this point I have spent a good 15 minutes trying to correct all the mistakes it has made. Sometimes it will get an entire sentence right in one go, but other times it struggles on single words.

Composing an e-mail however, is a complex task. It has to recognise each individual word, whereas a game would only need to recognise keywords which would cue the NPC to talk about that specific subject.

Role-playing games would be excellent with voice recognition, although extraordinarily difficult to implement. Imagine playing the next *Elder Scrolls* game as yourself, talking to people in your own words, rather than clicking through tiresome dialogue trees. Asking about quests directly, instead of leading up to it through related subjects. Greeting friendly NPCs in the street, offering them a drag on your skooma pipe. Picking a fight in an inn by calling a wood elf a short-arse and his friend an N'wah!

Your charisma attribute wouldn't be determined by how many points



Speak to me dammit.

you threw into it, but by your natural charm in reality. Perhaps spells could be cast in this way too, by speaking the magical incantation of a Greater Fireball, before unleashing it on a mudcrab. Distract foes with a psst and try not to make a sound as you sneak up behind him in the dark.

In Norway, I am fed up of correction everybody word I say. It is ferry late and a dam feeling a bit tyres. Goodnight P.C.s are one.

**Oars,**  
**Stew Wart Dog Leash**

This would be good fun, we agree – so long as it was of some use, unlike in *Tom Clancy's Endwar* – but the wide spectrum of swear words across various dialects in the world would make it almost impossible to localise.

I don't think a Khajiit would ever respond appropriately to "Aye ya fookin divvy" and "stick it up yer arse ya feckin' knob-jockey", which are arguably two of the most commonly uttered phrases when playing an *Elder Scrolls* game.



Russia. From the air.

### RUSSIA FROM THE AIR

Please print the attached photograph of Russia from the air.

**Ryan Kelly**

Done.

### NOOB TUBE

I was flicking through Issue 212 when I came across an informal letter that, if

put into one simple sentence would say "Stop calling noobs, noobs!"

I then thought that whoever wrote this, if he came to play the new *Aliens vs Predator* when it comes out he would probably gouge out his eyeballs as reams of text would flood a space on his screen just saying "noob!" or "zomfg you stupid noob!" I do recall the Predators and Aliens both to have one-hit kill

**"Reams of text would flood a space on his screen just saying 'noob!' or 'zomfg you stupid noob!'"**





Okay, this is just slightly awesome.

attacks. This is bound to make at least 40% of the players, (which lets face it are mostly teenagers below the game's age range) scream in rage.

I do believe the word noob has been around for sometime now and it's even got it's own place in the dictionary. I personally ignore the word but it has spread like The Black Death and it is a rarity to play a game and not see it at all.

AvP looks set to be a hell of a game, but I do think that the word "noob" will have a huge presence in it. I guess there's no escaping it.

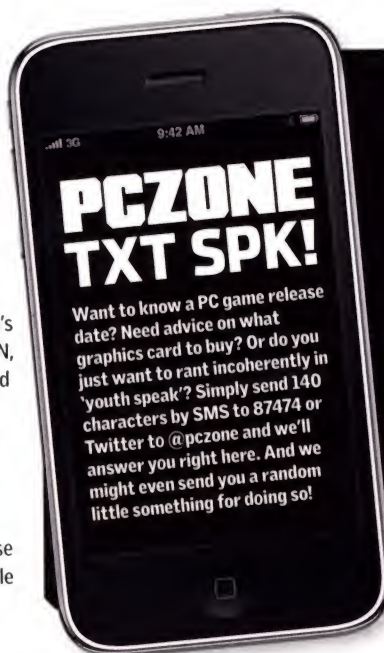
**Sam Clusker**

*Aliens vs Predator's* multiplayer game is peculiar, and its one-hit kills so blatantly overpowered, that there's a fear that the sort of people whose N, O and B buttons have been hammered into a shattered plastic mess (their love of bonbon fansites doesn't help) might end up avoiding it entirely.

We've reviewed it this issue on page 66, but as ever, balancing problems with multiplayer won't arise until thousands of players start to pile onto servers. They'll be in there,

somewhere, but the best we can hope for is ongoing support from Rebellion post-release.

That said, a Predator howling "noob" is a fairly funny image. Somebody should put some text on an picture. Impact font, naturally.



## SPLINTER'S HELL

You know all those strange people who get dressed-up as computer game characters? The ones who hang around conventions? Well, I always thought they were mental... until tonight. I was bored, so I thought I would dress-up as that bloke out of *Splinter Cell*.

I'm sure you'll agree that the result is very authentic.

If you print the classified photo attached, then I will of course have to kill everyone at *PC ZONE*. Sorry, it's an espionage-thing.

**Gavin Hay**

PS: You are correct - I don't have a girlfriend.

We continue to think the cosplay lot are an interesting breed, and very much believe that you're perfectly serious in your threat to now hunt us down and snap our necks like bony Toblerones.

## A CHARMLESS LIST

I've been meaning to write for a few years now but never really had a subject, until now!

See I've been a PC gamer for almost 11 years and a subscriber to your magazine for at least nine of those. The subject is gaming piracy, or should I say lack of it (in my house anyway). Today I am going to share my collection of games (not literally). All original, store-bought with books and everything. They are as follows, in no particular order: *Age of Empires 2: Gold Edition*, *Age of*



@pczone just wanted to see if this tweet would get printed in the mag  
**Martyn Bilsland**

OK, we'll let you know how that goes.

Is *Red Dead Redemption* ever coming to PC?  
**Guy Andrews**

Rockstar are keeping quiet, but it's almost a certainty that, like almost all Rockstar games, it will.

Oh God *Star Trek Online*, why is this not the best thing?  
**"Worf"**

It might still be the best thing... but it's got a lot to prove. Check out our preview on page 36 and a telling look back at Cryptic's "other MMO" on page 92.

**YOUR SHOUT!**

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS  
**WIN A FREE GAME!**

## MASS EFFECT

Matt Rivers

**PC ZONE SCORE 92%**

Going back to play *Mass Effect* in preparation of its incoming sequel has reminded me of several reasons why I hate this game.

If being a space commander means clicking about on a galaxy map and enduring loading screens while wankers intermittently call me up and ask for help, then I'd rather not be a bloody space commander.

And with only 40 or so planets in the entire galaxy, how the hell have some of them not been surveyed yet? All it takes is a click. Are futuristic civilisations really that lazy?

Otherwise the game is brilliant.

**YOUR SHOUT 98%**



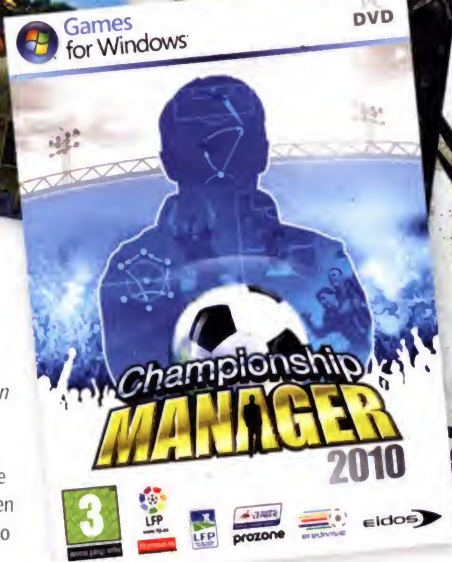
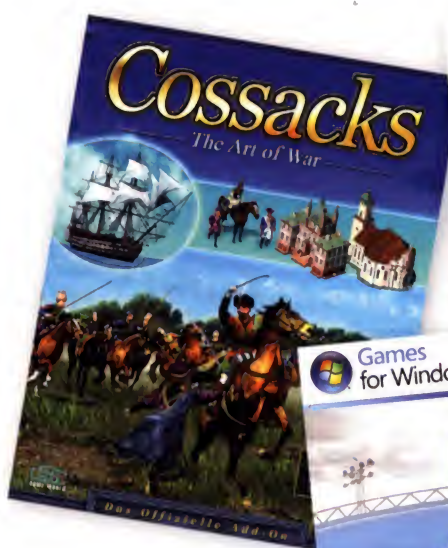
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Mythology, Vampire the Masquerade: Redemption, Championship Manager 99/00, Cossacks, European Wars... [the list continues for about 200 games] ...Fuel, Fallout 3, Operation Anchorage, The Pitt.

And there you have it, as you can see I love all genres. If anyone at Zone Towers does read this then they know that I will personally do all I can to keep the PC gaming industry alive LOL.

Seriously though I love PC gaming as do most your readers and 90% of all my games have been bought on your recommendation so, keep up the good work lads.

SKJB\$, via email

Mister \$KJB\$ concludes his letter by suggesting that he might be the

number one PC gamer in the world. He very might be, but readers, why not send us your giant, formless and humourless lists of games? The longer and more difficult to read the better.

### DO NOTHING

Firstly, after reading Nicholas Lovell's letter about Wandy's advice. I may have

## "They know that I will personally do all I can to keep the PC gaming industry alive LOL"

been one of the recipients of Wandy's "do nothing" recommendations to which Nicholas objected.

I'd SLI'd my original 8800GTX as a bit of an uplift to get me by until the next big upgrade. One card went pop and I was asking about replacements. Wandy suggested doing nothing. Since then I've played a number of games (including Fallout 3, Wolfenstein and Call of Juarez 2) on high settings and a good resolution (1680 x 1050) at a perfectly acceptable frame rate. The money I've saved will go to the next big purchase when I have to go Windows 7/ DirectX 11 or whatever. Doing nothing can be the right answer.

Secondly, your review of your new Xworks X8i-Ci7. I have its predecessor, the X8i-C2Q. I'd just like to point out that those nice people at Xworks will tailor the spec to your requirements. They spent a lot of time helping me sort out the right build, not always in their financial favour. Of course, slapping in a GTX295 is going to cost more but I'd hate readers to underestimate the potential power, alongside the excellent build-quality, of this range.

Martin Benton

Wandy's reet clever like that. He's also given our Hardware Buyer's Guide an complete overhaul too (page 104), rolling out his "do nothing" mantra as a solution to any debate whether you should purchase a cheap soundcard.

As most motherboards have 5.1 audio capabilities these days, you'd have to be some sort of madman to spend a bunch of cash on yet another circuit board to stick inside your PC, that'll force you to wrestle with Creative's perpetually awful drivers and software. <3



## PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



Paul "Monkey Bloke" Johnson's been volunteering in Borneo to help out these weird chimpanzee-type animals. He's graciously agreed to exploit the animal by making it hold a PC games magazine in exchange for a plea from us for you to check out [savetheorangutan.org.uk](http://savetheorangutan.org.uk) - wibble!

We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



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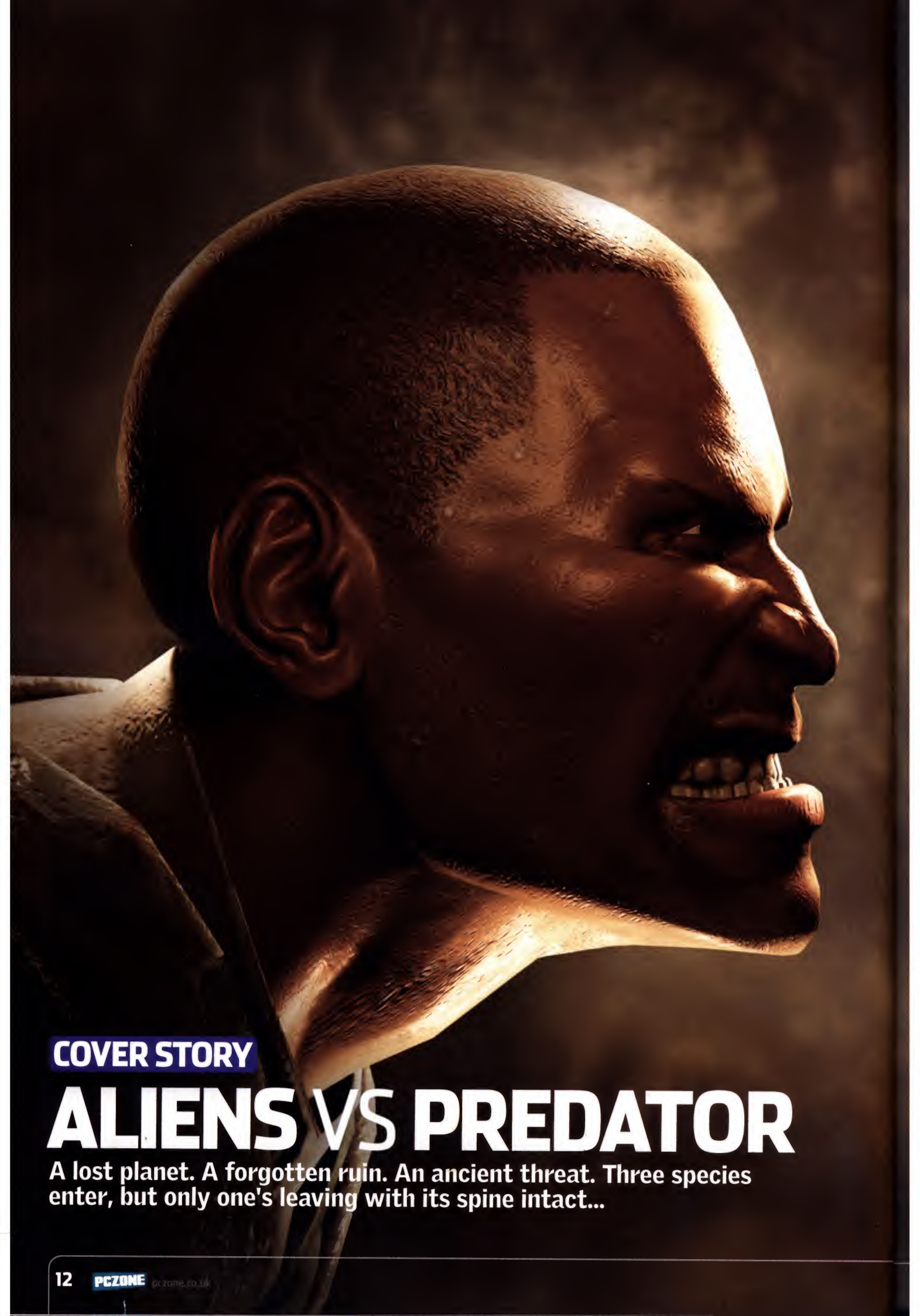


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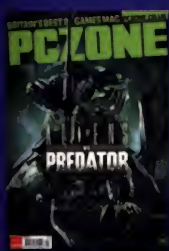


**COVER STORY**

# ALIENS VS PREDATOR

A lost planet. A forgotten ruin. An ancient threat. Three species enter, but only one's leaving with its spine intact...





**WE DIDN'T THINK** it'd be easy to rekindle a love of all things *Alien*. Sure, you can talk about the Ridley Scott film down the pub, wet-eyed and powered by a mixture of nostalgia and booze, but it's been a long time since it's felt current. The *Aliens vs Predator* films, as you know, never happened and don't exist. Nor does anything past the third film. So our passion for our soggy chitinous friends remained in hypersleep, until we were awoken to find Rebellion taking the helm of the series they created a decade ago. A triptych of adventures, one mired in fear, the others saturated with the most diabolical sort of violence you ever did witness. Get the sick bag ready.

PAGE

66



## UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming



HEY, IT'S ONLY ME

Steve Hogarty

**T**WICE. I PROMISE that's the maximum number of times you'll see of my doleful mug at the top of a column of self-important wankery. I should point out that I think the art editor's made my eyes shinier, so that I look like a pair of Crystal Maze trophies leering up at you from a butcher's counter.

In my Upfront guise, I'm here to introduce a host of games that can only be described as "not out yet". From *Metro 2033* - the one about a whole bunch of pigs and people who live underground - to the likes of *Just Cause 2* - the one about never ever touching the ground. They're polar opposites, so they are.

The latter is something we're particularly excited about: the latest in a long line of truly sandbox games about dickin'-around in tropical arenas, running along in-flight jumbo jets and leaping into helicopters while spinning your arms around and screaming excitedly about the madcap situation.

We've also got *Spec Ops: The Line*, the game that's threatening to make a sandy, post-apocalypse Dubai the next war-torn Afghanistan. Post-apocalypse might be a stretch, given that it's just a bit a sand that's managed to get everywhere, but it's a depressing place all the same.

Anyway, you wouldn't believe how much bloody work I've got to do. And that I've only got 25 minutes to finish this, and I've still got to do the other column. Flip back a few pages for that. Should be a laugh, as I'll be five times as flustered.

## THE DOCTOR MUZKYA

We find out what the score is regarding *Dragon Age: Awakening*DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE [dragonage.bioware.com/awakening](http://dragonage.bioware.com/awakening) ETA 16 MarchRay Muzyka  
CEO, BioWare

**B**IOWARE'S ONLY PC release of 2009 was *Dragon Age: Origins*. The game dropped players into a world that resembles Tolkien's Middle-earth, but with much more grit. Superb game design, writing and voice acting came together to make *Dragon Age* a classic.

*Awakening* is the first major expansion for the RPG. We caught up with Dr Muzkya to quiz him on what it'll bring to *Dragon Age* veterans.

**Q** What should we be looking forward to in *Awakening*?

**A** We're trying to take a lot of the things the fans have asked for, in terms of new systems, abilities, increasing the level cap and progression, plus learning more about the universe, the back story and history of the Darkspawn, and where they're from (kinda), with some plot twists added in there.

I don't want to spoil things for the players, but the story continuity is really interesting, you'll learn a lot of things about the universe. We've been working on *Awakening* for a while, so it's very solid, very high quality.

**Do you ever sleep? BioWare have so many games on the go now, it must be difficult to get any shut-eye.**

Well, we have 800 developers in the teams across the four locations I manage - Edmonton (our HQ), Montreal, Austin and Virginia - so there's lots of teams, lots of people all working on different projects.

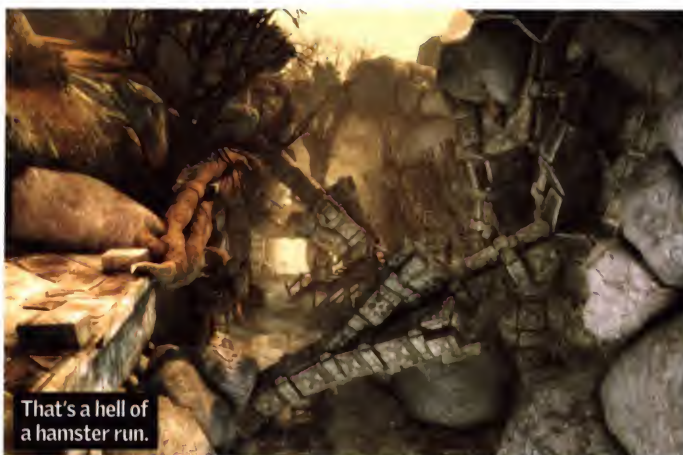
Our portfolio is very cool, I think. You can make RPGs and MMOs to fit any kind of gameplay or genre, it's just a combination of taking on a role and doing exploration, combat, progression to varying different degrees with different types of gameplay. So *Dragon Age* is one aspect of that, more of a cor-focused RPG, and I love that.

We have other stuff we haven't announced yet, so we've got a lot of different products being work on now. The franchise team on *Dragon Age* is big - they're doing paid DLC, the expansion, some stuff we haven't announced yet.

**Does *Awakening* bolt onto the main game like the current DLC does, or is it launched from the main menu?**

It's sort of a side thing, so you kinda branch off and then you can return to the

**"You can make RPGs and MMOs to fit any kind of gameplay or genre"**



That's a hell of a hamster run.

STOP PRESS!

## DLC FRENZY

Gearbox's *Borderlands* DLC offensive has increased with the announcement of *The Secret Armory of General Knox*. They'll be raising the level cap too.

## CHEAP FACE HUGGING

For who prefer polygonal Predators might have bought the first *AvP* game on Steam recently. It's now been given proper multiplayer support, hurrah!

## ULTIMATE FREE ULTIMA

It might not be the new beginning some would have like, but the *Ultima* series is making a comeback, as a free-to-play browser-based sort-of *SimCity* clone.



36

STAR TREK  
ONLINE

We go trekking  
across the universe.  
How enterprising.



44

METRO  
2033

We go spelunking  
under Moscow.  
How underground.



60

DEAD  
SPACE 2

We go stomping  
on babies above  
Saturn. How illegal.



main game. It provides continuity in terms of the story, but it's accessed through the menu. I think you can play as your main character or a new one. We're still working on some of the continuity things, how the character goes back and forth between the two, but we're going to try to make it as seamless as we can.

*Awakening* is a separate adventure within the same universe, so it provides a lot of continuity, but it's separate. What it will do is increase the level cap, although we haven't announced what that's going to be raised to yet.

I think we might allow some higher level saves, so you can re-spec some things with your character, but I'm not sure about that just yet.

#### How is the community responding in terms of user-generated content?

We're going to be putting a ranking system in soon to help people to rate the content that's being created. There's a limited system in place now, but we're thinking of new ways to extend it, to help them share things easier with each other. **+**



## STUFF

*Steam* has often been used as an example of why PC gaming isn't dying, but is doing rather well. Of course, it's harder to justify this argument when Valve refuse to release any statistics to aid in the fight, but it seems now that they have (a bit). They've now said that, during 2009, *Steam* picked up its 25millionth active account, of which 10 million have profiles in the Community bit. As well as this, unit sales for 2009 went up by a massive 205%, the fifth year in a row of above 100% year-on-year growth. Just think what would happen if they released *Half Life 2: Episode 3*!

## LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD  
TIMES

Ali's reign of terror is over and the ritualistic beatings have finally stopped.

Lots of great games to review and the fungus turns out to be tasty when mixed with a coriander and lemon sauce.

ON THE  
FENCE

Steve finds out the publishers have glued him to his seat, preventing him from ever going home again.

At least it means the paddling has stopped. Strange fungus grows around Steve's posterior after two weeks in the chair.

BAD  
TIMES

Steve's reign of terror has begun and with it, the naked paddling sessions.

IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

"Ma teef! Bare  
are me teef!"



# ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

*Pavel Barter peeps into the murky world of World of Warcraft private servers*

**T**HE DAY OF reckoning had arrived. It was December, 2008, and across the internet, *World of Warcraft* players, skipping gayly across the plains of Azeroth, far from Blizzard's gaze, were halted in their tracks. The reason? Letters from

Blizzard's lawyers: take down your unofficial server within 24 hours, or else.

Not liking the thought of jail, some of the biggest private servers disbanded.

Toxic Wow, Ani Wow, Wowfusion, Wowscope: all gone. This, many Warcrafters believed, was the beginning of the end.

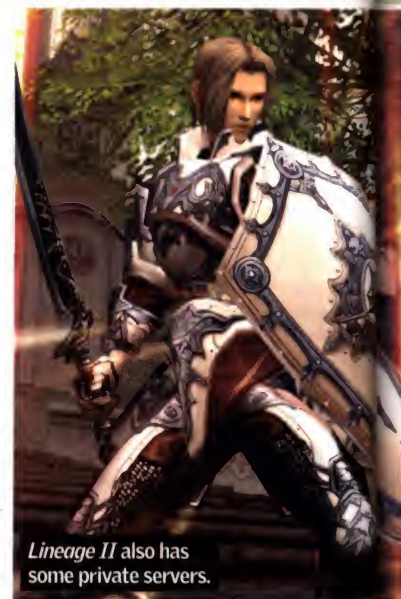
Cut to early 2010 and it seems the death of private servers was greatly exaggerated. Across the web, private servers are flourishing, sticking two troll fingers up to Blizzard and their legal chums. Magicwow, Wrath WoW, Neverendless World of Warcraft, Wow Legacy, Molten WoW: stuffed with players willing away the hours and avoiding the £8.99 a month fee for the official servers. Love them or hate them, private servers are the cockroaches of MMOs, thriving during Armageddon.

## ROGUE GAMERS

They're popular too, says Piers Harding-Rolls, senior analyst for games at Screen Digest (screendigest.com). "It's difficult to quantify how many people are using these private servers, but with a game like *WOW*, if you've got 50 to 100 private servers operating, and any server can hold a few thousand. That's not to say there is 20,000 to 30,000 *WOW* players on private servers, but the numbers do start to crank up. In terms of lost revenue for Blizzard, it's huge."

But what draws players to these lawless frontiers where they might be left at the mercy of a 16-year old from LA? All the rules are off, it appears, and you're not exactly crowded: there is enough room to swing a Spectral Tiger in Stormgate City.

"Some private servers are just a direct copy of the original game but others offer custom content for their



*Lineage II* also has some private servers.

players," says Tex, co-founder of the private *WOW* server Tenacious Gaming (tenaciousgaming.com). "TG does offer things that are not found in the original."

Such bounty includes the ability to auto-complete all quests, gain gold quicker, and rise above the level 80 limit. Some private servers give players an insight into expansion pack's races and places, while official subscribers are still unwrapping the packaging.

In November, 2006, for example, *Burning WOW* let you travel anywhere in the *Burning Crusade* expansion, two months before its official release.

Private servers have loitered around the fringes of the web since the dawn of *WOW* in late 2004. Since then, Blizzard have routinely set their lawyers onto these online rebels, calling foul on numerous legal grounds: the reverse engineering required to create the servers, piracy, and breaches of the End User License Agreement and Digital Millennium

Is there anything you want **PC ZONE** to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Special Report, PC ZONE,

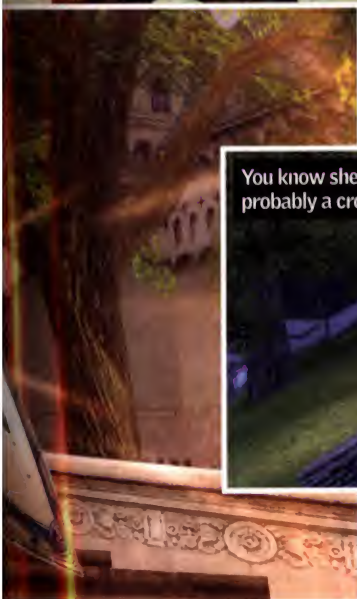
2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

Fancy a little head?





Not every goblin are under Blizzard's control.



You know she's probably a crook?

Copyright Act. Six years later, their stance has not exactly mellowed.

"We take pride in the work we've created and are committed to helping reduce copyright infringement and piracy," says a Blizzard spokesperson. "We also have a responsibility to our players to ensure the integrity and reliability of their *WOW* gaming experience, and that responsibility compels us to protect our rights."

## "Burning *WOW* let you travel in the *Burning Crusade* expansion, two months before its official release"

Other MMO publishers have followed suit, and NCsoft continue to threaten private servers. "Ultimately they impact our player communities, most of whom are playing games legitimately," says Véronique Lallier, NCsoft's European Managing Director. "Our responsibility to our players is paramount, and we strive to ensure the integrity and reliability of their game experiences."

Protecting legit players may sound like a tall story, but private servers have hardly done themselves favours, often having functionality and balance issues, poor support, and crashes.

Technical problems are unavoidable, admits Tenacious Gaming's Tex. "When you are playing on a private server you have to expect problems," he says. "We do not have the code from the original games, everything is custom made, so not everything works perfectly. While no private server is perfect, we strive to get rid of bugs as fast as possible to give players the best experience possible."

But the risks don't end there. Some private servers are empty, taking the MMO right out of MMORPG. And some server owners delete or change characters on a whim, and a few even commit fraud. In October 2009 one of the most popular *WOW* private servers, Scape Gaming, went from a group hug to an appearance in a Californian court. The

first sign of rot was when one of the server's founders was alleged to have pilfered money donated by players for server maintenance.

The dangers aren't just financial, according to publishers: "Private servers can expose players' computers to malicious software, and players who access these servers generally are sending personal login information to server operators who have little to no accountability for how that data will be used," said Blizzard's spokesperson.

## CUDDLY PIRATES

Scape Gaming was no more, but others appeared in its place. For *WOW* players disillusioned with the official servers, or wanting to try something different, the attraction of these alternate worlds persist. After all, many private servers genuinely strive for a fun experience.

Tenacious Gaming, for example, has 50 staff members (some who moved just before Scape Gaming's demise) regulating thousands of players. "It does take a lot of organisation to run and MMO efficiently for the players," says Tex. "Some servers try to skimp on customer service, but not us. We take account of what the players want and try to give it to them (within reason)."

In the true spirit of rebellion, private servers remain unbowed. Many *WOW* players, tired of moving their virtual belongings when a server is forced to close, just want everyone to get along.

"We do not try to take players away from the retail version of the games and a lot of our players play both," says Tex. "Most players just want a place to go play with their friends with some super-powered equips to relieve the stress of the daily grind." Just don't expect MMO publishers to join the party. **PCZ**



ANTHONY SMITH  
GAMES-MASTERS.COM

## MODERN WARFARE

There's no love lost between private servers and free MMOs, says Anthony Smith of publisher Games-Masters.com.

**Q** Have private servers had an impact on your business?

**A** They have affected us, as it has affected many other publishers, with a loss of potential players and revenues. In the past, when the majority of games cost a subscription, private servers would offer a free and alternative option to players. But with the rise of games that are free to the user – which applies to all our games – this is no longer the case. In many cases, the type of person who runs a private server has changed, and instead of being run by players with an interest in the game, is now commonly run by individuals wishing to make a profit, whether that's by selling services or stealing the user's data.

**What risks do gamers face joining these servers?**

The data provided at registration alone, including details such as home address, email, or bank or card details, can easily be exploited. We've seen this from users who have logged into their account on our service to find all of their virtual items stolen, caused by downloading a client from a private server that had a Trojan.

**What about private servers set up by people that love your games?**

If players love the games, and wish to see them continue to succeed, they should contribute towards those who develop and make them possible.

I know that many people have a passion for games and want to get involved in development. Yet there are legal ways of doing this, whether by getting involved in an open-source project or creating their own game.



**PCZONE** Charts

Official data compiled by



- 1 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**  
Issue 214 - 88%
- 2 **THE SIMS 3**  
Issue 208 - 92%
- 3 **MODERN WARFARE 2**  
Issue 215 - 94%
- 4 **THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**  
Issue 215 - 78%
- 5 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**  
Issue 206 - 78%
- 6 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**  
Issue 202 - 86%
- 7 **DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**  
Issue 214 - 93%
- 8 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**  
Issue 203 - 91%
- 9 **LEFT 4 DEAD 2**  
Issue 215 - 94%
- 10 **BORDERLANDS**  
Issue 215 - 88%
- 11 **FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION**  
N/A
- 12 **JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR: THE GAME**  
Issue 216 - 58%
- 13 **SPORE**  
Issue 199 - 95%
- 14 **WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II**  
Issue 205 - 91%
- 15 **CSI: DEADLY INTENT**  
N/A
- 16 **NEW MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X GOLD**  
N/A
- 17 **OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING**  
Issue 213 - 90%
- 18 **NEW AGE OF EMPIRES III: COMPLETE COLLECTION**  
N/A
- 19 **NEW FARMING SIMULATOR 2009**  
Issue 213 - 21%
- 20 **PES 2010**  
Issue 215 - 85%



**11. FALLOUT 3: GOTY**  
Contains *Fallout 3* and all of its DLC from *Operation: Anchorage* to *Mothership Zeta*.



**16. MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X GOLD**  
The game with the *Acceleration* and *Deluxe* add-ons. For plane geeks only.



**15. CSI: DEADLY INTENT**  
Another in the CSI range of near-casual videogames. No Grissom though, so it's not proper CSI.



**18. AGE OF EMPIRES III: COMPLETE COLLECTION**  
*AOE3*, with the *War Chiefs* and *Asian Dynasties* expansions.

# QUITTING THE INTERNET

## *Cities XL* is going offline

WEBSITE [citiesxl.com](http://citiesxl.com)

WHAT WAS SO promising has ended in partial disaster, we're afraid to report. Few kept paying the monthly subscription for *Cities XL*'s online components, so Monte Cristo have called time on it. The game's multiplayer servers will be up until 8 March, 2010 and no new stuff will be added to the game, until *Cities XL 2011* comes out.

This new game – a single player-only experience – will include some things featured in the online component of *Cities XL*, and it'll also be released at the same time as a bunch of themed content packs based on Europe, America and Asia. Monte Cristo say these will be filled with buildings, maps and Megastructures. The whole kit and kaboodle will appear as a digital download sometime in the future.

"The avatar mode is tied to the online game," Monte Cristo write in a big FAQ posted on the *Cities XL* website, "and it will disappear with it. The Blueprints gameplay will be redesigned and retrofitted to be part of *Cities XL 2011*. Actual Megastructures will be spread through multiple paid content packs."



"The core solo gameplay will not change a lot but it will see many improvements in *Cities XL 2011*. The trade system will be included in *Cities XL 2011* so it will become possible to trade between your own cities and specialise them the same way you would do in Planet gameplay. It will also enable you to use Blueprints and build Megastructures. The current map selection system will be redone in favour of a planet system; it will also include 10 more maps."

This isn't an entirely unexpected development. While the core city-building mechanic was solid and offered plenty of depth for the enthusiast, a subscription model for the relatively thin features of the online mode was pushing things too far.

# A KNIGHT RETURNS

## GOG joins with Activision

WEBSITE [gog.com](http://gog.com)

OUR FAVOURITE RETRO games website has pulled off another coup, getting publishing titan Activision to join forces with them and release some old titles.

At the time of writing two games have formed the spearhead of the new initiative. The first is *Arcanum* and the second is, more pleasingly, *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*. It's the full talkie version as well, starring Mark Hamill, Michael Dorn, Ephrem Zimbalist Jr and Tim Curry as the titular bookstore owner-turned-schatenjager.

If you don't know what we were talking about there, shame on you for not reading Retro Zone in issue 207. It's worth talking about *Arcanum* too, which has a surprising number of devout followers across the globe. It's a vast



fantasy RPG, very much in the mold of *Fallout* and *Fallout 2*.

Speculation is rife as to what other Activision games will be appearing on the website in the near future. *Vampire the Masquerade – Bloodlines* perhaps (preferably fixed)? Other Sierra titles that were snaffled up Activision a few years back? (Maybe we'll see the return of *King's Quest*?) We wait with nearly baited breath for the answers.



Wash your hands first.

Prod a stoned marsupial in the eye.

# LOADSAMONEY

## Microsoft cashes in with 7

WEBSITE microsoft.com

IT WAS A LONG, hard road for Microsoft but it seems as if they've finally hit upon something people actually like for a change. This is *Windows 7*, the follow-up to the not-that-bad-really OS *Vista*, which some people hate with a passion.

The company has announced revenues of \$19 billion for the second quarter of 2009, which is a mind-boggling figure in itself. This represents a 14% increase over last year's same period, which they're attributing to *Windows 7*.

"Exceptional demand for *Windows 7* led to the positive top-line growth for

the company. Our continuing commitment to managing costs allowed us to drive earnings performance ahead of the revenue growth," bleated Peter Klein – chief financial officer at Microsoft –, in a barely intelligible statement.

Sixty million *Windows 7* licenses have been sold in that period alone, which makes it the fastest selling operating system in history. Something Microsoft are very happy with.

So are we wrong to like *Windows 7*? Should we be casting a loving eye back at *XP* saying, "Ah, those were the days." Let us know at the usual address.

### "Exceptional demand for *Windows 7* led to the positive top-line growth for the company"

Peter Klein, spouter of nonsense, Microsoft

# FIREFOX UNITED

## Browser-based *FIFA* coming to the West at last

WEBSITE easportsfifaonline2.com

EVER THOUGHT ABOUT playing *FIFA* with a mouse? It sounds crazy (although it has been done before) but that's what EA Sports are going to be bringing to the online gaming table very soon.

The game has been a staple in Asia for a number of years now, but now westerners are going to be able to play

it. It's one of the new breed of not-really-free-to-play games that work through your browser. To actually play will be free, but to play with any degree of competence will almost certainly involve stumping up for some of the premium content.

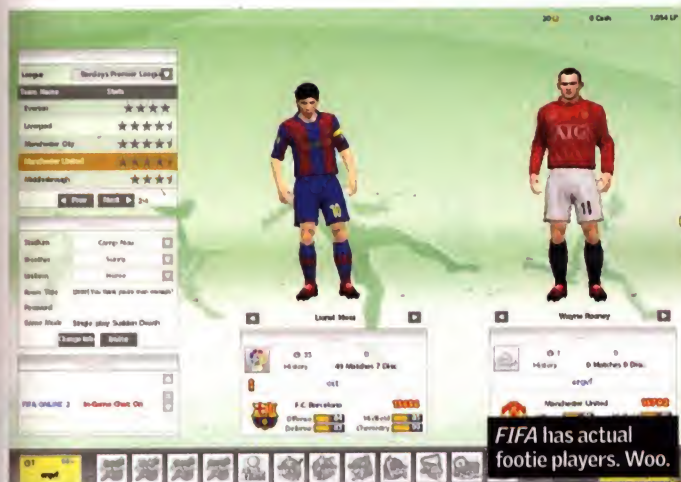
As you'd expect from a *FIFA* title, it'll have all the bump that comes with a

football game – accurate licenses, leagues and players, that sort of thing. There'll be three game modes to choose from – World Cup, League and Versus – which makes you wonder if the first two are competitive when there's a specific Versus mode.

It'll also boast upgraded graphics, but whether that puts them in sync with

the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions is another matter. An open beta will be commencing in June, so get your shin pads on and your mouse hand ready if you want to get involved.

We also don't know if you can use a game pad or if it will be mouse only for now, but more news as and when we get it, of course.



FIFA has actual footie players. Woo.



Was this 3D artist blind?



# Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

**W**E'RE ALREADY WELL into the futuristic year of 2010. If Arthur C Clarke is to be believed, this is the year that Jupiter will explode into a miniature sun.

Given that this guy tends to be right about future stuff (except about computers going insane and killing people during manned space flights to the aforementioned gas giant), this

means we'll only have a few months to play games before we all stare into the sky in wonder (or die from a massive blast of radiation created by a star's creation). But what games are there to look forward to? The return of Kane, the fight to become a made man again? Walk in Ripley's shoes one more time? Good times will be had before Jupiter goes boom.

## BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

We're excited about this one. The *Battlefield* name is a respected one on the PC, but the *Bad Company* game never appeared on the PC. EA Digital Illusions CE (DICE to their freinds) are correcting that oversight with the realisation of *Bad Company 2*.

The single-player campaign uses that rarely seen plot of a bunch of elite soldiers being sent out on a secret mission, that'll likely save the world. But few buy a *Battlefield* game because they want to play solo – they want the multiplayer.

And this is where DICE have scored points, as they'll be providing dedicated server support. So developers do learn from the mistakes of their peers.



GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
GREAT BATTLES MEDIEVAL	DEEP SILVER	19 FEB
SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES	PARADOX	19 FEB
NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR	SEGA	23 FEB
ANNO 1404: VENICE	UBISOFT	26 FEB
ALIENS VS PREDATOR	SEGA	28 FEB
M.U.D. TV	KALYPSO	FEBRUARY
COMMAND & CONQUER 4	EA	1 MARCH
SETTLERS 7	UBISOFT	1 MARCH
ASSASSIN'S CREED II	UBISOFT	4 MARCH
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2	EA	5 MARCH

## SILENT HUNTER 5

This will be the latest game in the venerable series of sims that make *Microsoft Flight Simulator* seem like a PopCap release. It's been a while since we've seen any ultra-realistic submarine simulators – or any submarine simulators of any kind, come to think of it – so we getting ready to welcome *Silent Hunter 5* with open torpedo hatches.

Set in World War II during the Battle of the Pacific, this game will have you hunting down Allied ships, while avoiding detection by the

American and British navies. Just as the game's name says, silence will be your biggest weapon in this game. So be very, very, very quiet.



SILENT HUNTER 5	UBISOFT	5 MARCH
SUPREME COMMANDER 2	SQUARE ENIX	5 MARCH
GRAY MATTER	DTP	10 MARCH
DRAGON AGE: AWAKENING	EA	16 MARCH
METRO 2033	THQ	19 MARCH
MOUNT & BLADE: WARBAND	PARADOX	19 MARCH
BRINK	BETHESDA	26 MARCH
JUST CAUSE 2	SQUARE ENIX	26 MARCH
ALL POINTS BULLETIN	EA	MARCH
DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING	THQ	MARCH

## AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers – this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.





<b>DARK STAR ONE</b>	KALYPSO	APRIL
<b>POLE POSITION 2010</b>	KALYPSO	APRIL
<b>SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION</b>	UBISOFT	APRIL
<b>MAFIA II</b>	2K GAMES	MAY
<b>ACHTUNG PANZER</b>	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
<b>SINGULARITY</b>	ACTIVISION	SPRING 2010
<b>ALIENS: COLONIAL MARCHINES</b>	SEGA	SPRING 2010
<b>ALPHA PROTOCOL</b>	SEGA	SPRING 2010
<b>BATTLEFIELD 1943: PACIFIC</b>	EA	SPRING 2010
<b>BLUR</b>	ACTIVISION	SPRING 2010
<b>LEAD AND GOLD</b>	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
<b>RISE OF PRUSSIA</b>	PARADOX	SPRING 2010
<b>STARGATE RESISTANCE</b>	FIRESKY	SPRING 2010
<b>THE AGENCY</b>	SOE	SPRING 2010
<b>WHISPERED WORLD</b>	DEEP SILVER	SPRING 2010
<b>MAX PAYNE 3</b>	ROCKSTAR	WINTER 2010
<b>BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2</b>	WARNER	TBA 2010
<b>BEYOND GOOD &amp; EVIL 2</b>	UBISOFT	TBA 2010
<b>CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION</b>	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
<b>COMMANDER: CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS</b>	PARADOX	TBA 2010
<b>CRYSIS 2</b>	EA	TBA 2010
<b>DC UNIVERSE ONLINE</b>	SOE	TBA 2010
<b>DEAD ISLAND</b>	TECHLAND	TBA 2010
<b>DEUS EX 3</b>	EIDOS	TBA 2010
<b>DIABLO III</b>	ACTIVISION	TBA 2010
<b>HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE</b>	VALVE	TBA 2010
<b>MAGICKA</b>	PARADOX	TBA 2010
<b>R.U.S.E.</b>	UBISOFT	TBA 2010
<b>RAGE</b>	EA	TBA 2010
<b>SECRET WORLD</b>	FUNCOM	TBA 2010
<b>SPEC OPS: THE LINE</b>	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
<b>STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC</b>	LUCASARTS	TBA 2010
<b>STARCRAFT II: PROTOSS</b>	ACTIVISION	TBA 2010
<b>STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY</b>	ACTIVISION	TBA 2010

## ALPHA PROTOCOL

One of the main reasons we're looking forward to *Alpha Protocol* so much is the conversation system. Think of it like the one used in *Mass Effect*, but with

much more sophistication and, crucially, a timer so you can't just spend ages analysing each response to find out which one brings the best response.

Each response represents a 'stance', a different attitude taken to the conversation. Be aggressive and the other character might flinch, or might even laugh at your lame attempt at intimidation.

If Obsidian deliver on this game, it could mean BioWare will have a serious challenger to the title of King of All RPG Developers.



## MAX PAYNE 3

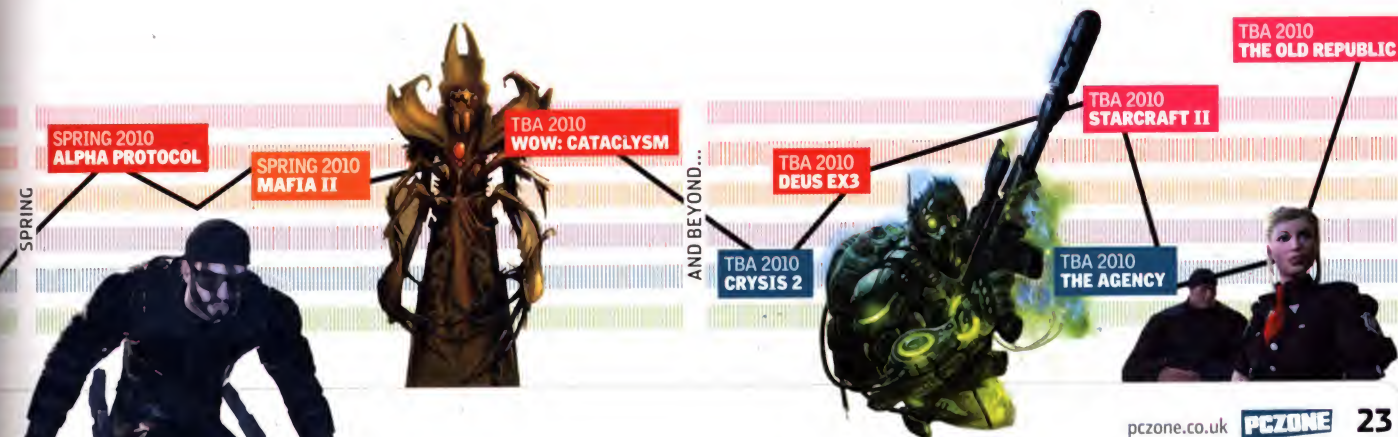
We're going to remain optimistic about the new Payne. He might look like a bearded Phil Mitchell, but he's earned our love twice before, so why not again?

It might be a shock to the system to see him in anything but his traditional long black leather jacket, let alone be in the heat of South America, rather than the snow and rain of a New York winter, but vests could well be the new must-have fashion accessory in gaming today (see Hot Shots on page 28).

For us the best thing about this game is the developers have listened to our countless jokes about Max's painkiller addiction. Good for us, less good for our hero.



<b>STARCRAFT II: ZERG</b>	ACTIVISION	TBA 2010
<b>THIEF 4</b>	EIDOS	TBA 2010
<b>VICTORIA 2</b>	PARADOX	TBA 2010
<b>WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm</b>	ACTIVISION	TBA 2010
<b>GHOST RECON 4</b>	UBISOFT	TBA 2011
<b>WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO</b>	THQ	TBA 2011
<b>DEAD SPACE 2</b>	EA	EARLY 2011
<b>SWORD OF THE STARS 2</b>	PARADOX	EARLY 2011





**RED MEANS DEAD**

Sam believes Third Echelon have something to do with his daughter's death, so he's going after the people he thinks knocked her off. That means they've got the cool tri-light helmet things, but because they're evil, their lights glow red instead of green. Red, just like that Russian's in the co-op campaign... hmm.

**SAVE THE B-BALL**

Washington DC is the place where a lot of the action takes place, a bunch of ne'er-do-wells having vowed to do some damage to it at some point during the game. Sam's the only one who can stop the baddies levelling the city and forcing the Washington Wizards basketball franchise from having to relocate to another city!



# SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

**DEVELOPER** Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** [splintercell.uk.ubi.com](http://splintercell.uk.ubi.com) **ETA** April 2010

**WE** SPOKE ABOUT THE lovely co-op bits back in issue 216, so we thought it was time we reminded you that it's not all about working in pairs to clear out the enemy.

If you decide to go it alone, you'll be Sam Fisher again, although this time you won't be working with the folks at

Third Echelon. Fisher's gone rogue after learning some things about his daughter's death and his old bosses are after him. As you can see from the picture above, he's got to use every available means to defend himself, because his enemies have that most dangerous of weapons: hats with three glowing lights on them. Run, Sam, run!



A man in a green sweater and brown trousers is holding a handgun over a man in a suit. The man in the suit is looking down. The background is dark with some green foliage.

### BETTER THAN KEVLAR

Other people are more than just window dressing, they can also be used as human shields should the glowing red eye men get too close to dear old Sam. Whether you get to ruthlessly execute them after they've served their purpose is unknown at this time. But you will get to torture and viciously beat the occasional bad guy.

### FARMYARD CHIC

Sam looks anything but an action hero in his latest adventure. With that green jumper and light brown trousers ensemble, he looks more like a relatively well-groomed farmer. That's a farmer that can shoot an enemy's cock off from 200 yards away, while hanging from the ceiling and doing the splits, mind.





GARY BRACEY, FOUNDER, DIGIMASK

# A HEAD OF THE GAME

Meet the guy who gets your head in the game

**G**ARY BRACEY HAS been around the block in the British games industry long enough to have some tales to tell, having helped to establish Britsoft legends Ocean Software back in the '80s and, more recently, founding put-your-face-in-the-game specialists Digimask.

**Q** What was the computer game industry like in the '80s?

**A** When I joined Ocean we had about five or six people, which quickly grew to around 40 in a couple of years. That was huge in those days, bearing in mind that a team writing one game would comprise of a programmer and an artist. Or you had people like Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith [the man behind ZX Spectrum games *Green Beret* and *Daley Thompson's Supertest*] who was a great artist and a great programmer, so would do the whole thing himself. It generally took around three months to make a game and if it tanned then you didn't lose an awful lot of money. So very different to today!

You had some real stars emerge. I remember when a developer called Martin Kenwright approached me with a single sheet of paper containing

a game design for a flight simulator. They showed me some triangles spinning on the screen which were pretty smooth and running at a decent speed, so I thought, "OK, these guys can do it." And they delivered a game a year later called *F29 Retaliator*.

Those guys, Digital Image Design, went on to become Evolution Studios [developers of PS3 racer *MotorStorm*].

**You pioneered the use of licensed movie games at Ocean.**

I recall talking to movie studios about *RoboCop*. Which for me was the sea change. Until then we'd done *Top Gun* and *Rambo* and whatnot, and they did reasonably well, the games were OK. But then we were sent a script for this movie called *RoboCop*, and I said to our MD, John Woods, "We should get this one, I think it could be big." We put an awful lot into the game design and the development and it became the first ever million-selling game.

I remember meeting Steven Spielberg and discussing making *Jurassic Park* into a videogame. And that then became another milestone – because it became the first million-dollar advance to make a videogame



licensed from a movie title. I also remember Matt Groening rejecting a sequence from an early *Simpsons* game because Bart's blink was, and I quote, "off model." So it was lots of stuff like that. It wasn't major stuff, but it was just a headache.

**Was it a nightmare to make games before email and the internet?**

Well we used to have to chisel out bits of rock to send notes to each other! And cave paintings... The big change in terms of game development, due to the likes of

the web and email, was that people could work remotely from each other. So suddenly elements of the game could be outsourced – whether it be graphics or animation or modelling or whatever – which they never could before.

**You now work on face-mapping tech Digimask. How did this come about?**

One of the dreams I had always had was the potential for personalization. For you within the game. Going back to the old *Tron* days, I suppose! So we were always waiting for the graphics and processing capability of machines to get to a point where this was viable.

We are just at the beginning of the next stage of this type of tech which will enable it to go further. And be an awful lot more accurate – biometrically accurate actually (which in turn opens up all sorts of security doors), but it is all about personalization.

**What about the uncanny valley?**

If you take your own head, and then reproduce it in a computer-generated environment, then there is something not right about it: the uncanny valley which is the leap between that and something that is completely realistic.

What was once explained to me is that we need that difference. With videogames, particularly, we don't want

## GET A HEAD IN VIDEOGAMING

What is Digimask, and how does it work?



Gary Bracey's Digimask system lets your fantasy come true: putting you inside a computer game. The system sounds simple: You take a front and profile photo of your face, and upload it into the computer. Next the Digimask SDK creates textures based on your skin and hair, and a wireframe head based on the photos.

Next, Digimask adds this custom-made bonce to the game's standard 3D avatar, which is also tweaked to make sure the head looks correct when it's in position.

If you want to test out Digimask for yourself, head to [minimoys.3ds.com](http://minimoys.3ds.com).





**"There was one leap, from 2D to 3D, but we're still playing the same games that we've always played"**



Gary Bracey, today.

it to be 100% accurate. We don't want your avatar to be mistaken for you in a game scene getting your throat cut, getting your eyes gouged out, or even just walking along.

When you're talking about photorealistic representations – Digimask taken to its nth degree of accuracy, so that the light framing your hair is perfectly right or whatever – I think at that point you start becoming just a little bit disconcerted about it. It is a bit like artificial intelligence.

**We've never really considered the philosophical implications.**

The sea change for videogames still has not happened. There was one leap, from 2D to 3D, but, really, we're still playing the same games that we've always played. The interaction in over 90% of new games is similar to what we were playing 25 years ago. I don't think core game design has moved on as much as the technology. And that is a real shame.

There could be someone out there right now with the most revolutionary interactive gaming idea who cannot get it off the ground, because the publishers he or she has seen have said, "I'm sorry but this does not conform to what we know as being a videogames and therefore we cannot risk millions of dollars being spent on the development.

**There's some interesting tech on the horizon.**

In 10 years from now you'll have a set-top box that'll be your entertainment delivery system. It's the smart people coming up with genuine ways of revolutionising the control method of gaming.

I went into a 3D virtual environment in France made by Dassault Systems. It was amazing. I wanted to be sick, but it was incredible. That holodeck-style utterly immersive environment is where we'll be in 2020. **PCZ**



JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

# Maybe tomorrow I'll Wanna Settle Down.



**W**ell, this is odd. I'm back in the *PC Zone* offices, chewing the same Kit Kat Senses from the new snack carousel, and staring at the slightly updated stacks of PC games and wondering how much I can get away with stealing. It's 16 months since I took a pair of shears to the umbilical cord of guaranteed income. Over a year since I cart wheeled with financial lethality through a zero-G cash-vacuum. And now, I'm back. Think of me as the Littlest Hobo, visiting any magazine that will throw me a can of dog food.

So what's new? Through whatever foul play, Steve's clawed his way to the top, and there's a nice bloke called David Brown who refuses to change his name to Shitters McGee, no matter how unique and edgy I tell him it'd be. It feels most appropriate, in this situation, to tell you what I did on my summer holiday. So here's what I've done in the last 16 months.

## 1. LOST MY HEART TO A GYROMANCER

It's the game that took *Bejewelled Twist*, and added a story about... well, I don't know, because it was so shit I clicked through it. It shouldn't have got through my defences. I'm better than a PopCap Match-3 game. But there's something about twisting a set of gems that snagged my brain. Swapping a pair of gems is for losers. In fact, I'd go as far as to say *Bejewelled 2* is the sport of the subnormal. But twisting gems? And levelling? Now that's a game to which I can balefully sign away my life to!

At level 10, I walked past an advert that told me to text 84464. I don't know what the advert was for, but my brain helpfully told me that I could match those fours in a single twist. By level 30, I spent an hour unable to sleep, trying to imagine the gems in a position that would set off a 5x5 cross. Level 50 – and I wish this was a lie – I found myself phasing out of conversations and involuntary imagining cascades of matching jewels.

Have you ever had to apologise to your partner, and say "Could you repeat that? There was a seven-combo on your face when you got to all that stuff about how distant I've been recently"? It doesn't end well.

## 2. WORKED AT THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

Having casual-gamed myself into bankruptcy, the opportunity to work in a new place cropped up: the middle-England baiting *Mail on Sunday*. And here's an unshock: no-one in the *Mail on Sunday* offices is evil. Nor stupid. And apart from the handful of opinion-piece psychos who wire in their pieces from an asylum, no-one believes in the crap the paper prints.

Sometimes, when you read the paper, you can pick up a coded message, like someone trying to write, "This is bullshit, don't believe it,"



**"Here's an unshock: no-one in the *Mail on Sunday* offices is evil. Nor stupid"**

into the gaps between the words. It's like a recently zombified wife who pauses sadly before chewing her husband's face off. And it's a genuinely enjoyable place to work. The pay structure has a certain amount of soul-selling factored in, the canteen does burgers, and the immigrant cleaning staff laugh warmly along with the headlines that marginalise them, knowing that it's all a big game of pretend. I miss it: the people are great, and it was one of the few times my mum was impressed with my job.

## 3. MADE JOKES ABOUT WANKING MORE OFTEN THAN I ACTUALLY WANKED

It's the first joke you make when you go freelance. And if you don't make the joke, someone else will so it's a challenge to think of new ways to make the "Working from home, I spend 95% of my time masturbating" gag.

But the solemn truth is, when you're convinced you've committed a grave act of misjudged hubris, and your blood has been transfused with a kind of thick grey dread soup, the last thing you want to do is dust off your favourite JPEG and strangle your groin. So, if anyone tells you they've spent their entire freelance day wanking, they're either lying, or they're too embarrassed to tell you that they're writing for the *Mail on Sunday*.

Like I said, it's only for a week. Then I'll be playing PopCap games, missing working for an employer whose official line is that my sexuality is evil and clinically unable to masturbate. Jesus. What have I done? **PCZ**

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW



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SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010

SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010



heaven & hell

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JAMES DIO

TONY  
IOMMI

GEEZER  
BUTLER

VINNY  
APPICE

JOE BONAMASSA FOREIGNER  
BACHMAN & TURNER

HAMMER STAGE

Black Label Society



PROG STAGE



marillion Argent

STEVE HACKETT

MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH  
(PERFORMING ARGUS)

URIAH HEEP  
(PERFORMING DEMONS & WIZARDS)

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1



# MAFIA II

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE [mafia2game.com](http://mafia2game.com) ETA Summer 2010

**W**E REALLY CAN'T wait for *Mafia II*. It's going to be brillo-pads, seriously. What could possibly go wrong between now and the time it's released? Don't answer that, just in case. But yeah, it's going to be fantastic. Just look at these hottest of shots to see what we mean. The slicked-back hair, the insistence on wearing vests and braces out in public, the bespectacled 'straight' man who would never indulge in fisticuffs but who secretly loves a bit of violence – they'll all be there.

The game starts off in 1945 and will be completely open-ended. There won't be any bridges that just so happen to have been blocked off at the start, preventing you from getting across. You can go anywhere right from the beginning, although perhaps there might not be much point, other than sight-seeing. You'll be playing young goon Vito Scaletta, who's ambition it is to become a made man, not a dead one. Spanning the course of 10 years, you'll get to see Vito mature from a fresh-faced youth to a grizzled veteran of the art of murder. Again, we can't wait.

3







## THE BIGGER PICTURE

### 1. TEACH HIM A LESSON

As you'd expect from a game about the world of organised crime, beatings are a necessary part of everyday life. The guy with the vest hasn't given in to the demands of the Family, but he'll change his mind after a sound drubbing.

### 2. IN THE ARMY

World War II-era firearms, like the MP40 and M3 Grease Gun, will be present, but Tommy guns will be our weapon of choice. It wouldn't be a mafia game without a Tommy gun.

### 3. THE FUZZ

The police will still be around, ready to pounce on unsuspecting players. Thankfully, you can bribe them to turn a blind eye to your misdemeanours. Just don't let them find the dead body stuffed in the trunk or you'll be in trouble.

### 4. BANGING TUNES

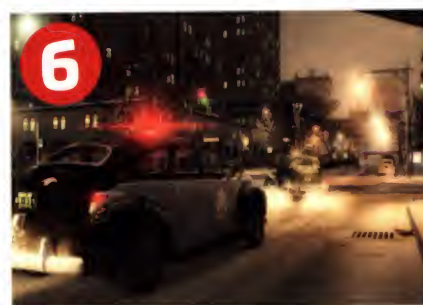
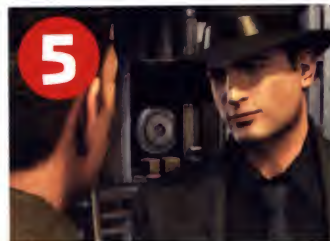
A wide selection of vintage music will be available to listen to as you drive around in the 50 or so authentic vehicles. Last time we had Django Reinhardt playing on our radios, so will we have Little Richard and Chuck Berry on in this one?

### 5. AUTHENTIC APPAREL

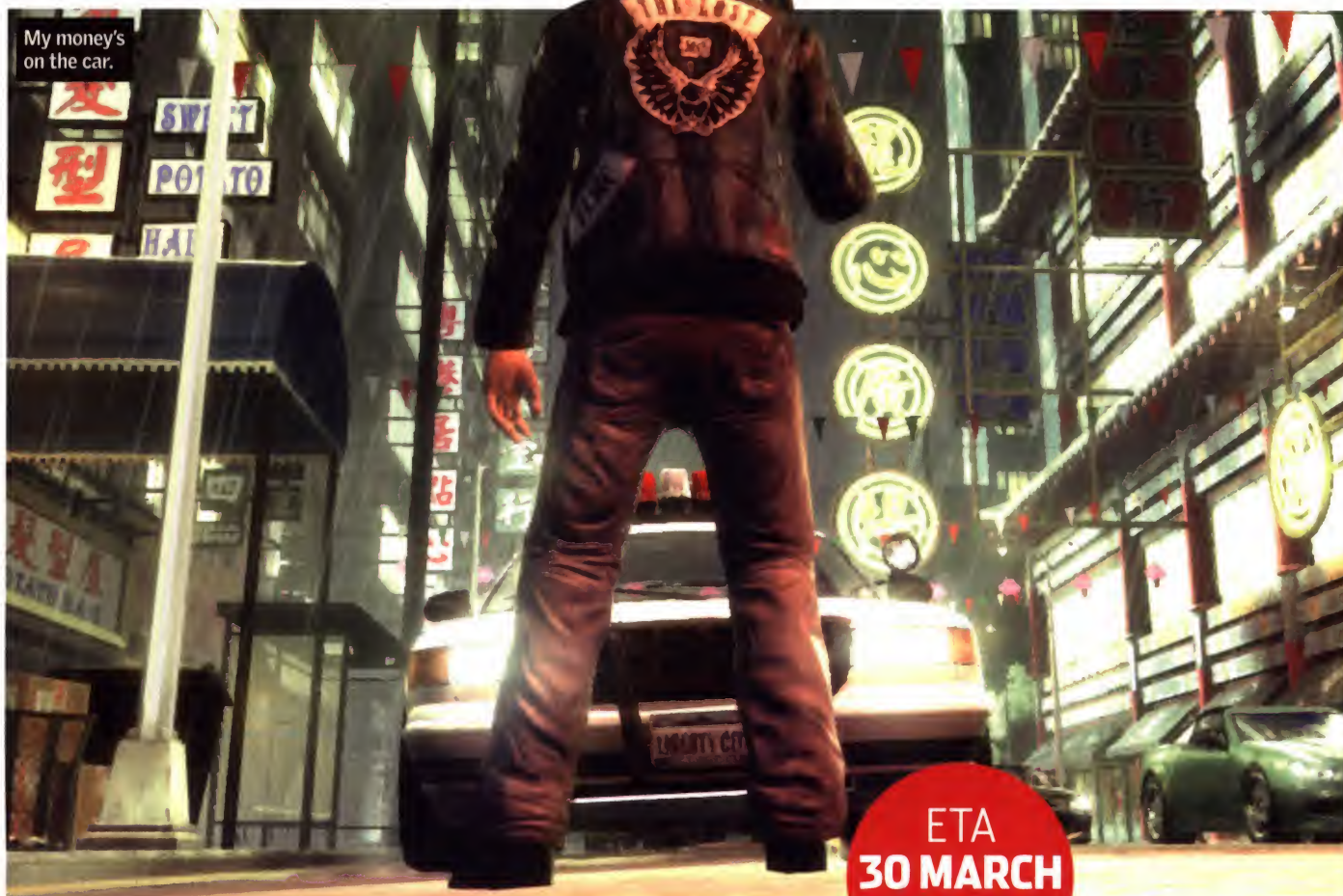
The tone of the game will be gritty and dark compared to the original. A lot of work has gone into producing a quality realisation of the era, not the idealised version that the team went for in the first game.

### 6. GEAR CHANGE

Hopefully there won't be anything like the ludicrous difficult race from the first game. We assume 2K Czech has learned that lesson and will be slightly more forgiving if any racing needs to be done.







ETA  
**30 MARCH  
2010**

**THE DAMNED UNITED...**

# GTA IV: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY

**David Brown** likes to cruise around on his Harley

DEVELOPER Rockstar North PUBLISHER Rockstar Games WEBSITE [rockstargames.com/IV](http://rockstargames.com/IV)

**ONCE THE HUBBUB** died down and people stopped (rightly) grumbling about inadequate performance, *Games for Windows - LIVE!* integration and the irksome Rockstar Social Club, people saw *Grand Theft Auto IV* was a great game. The closest games have come to recreating an authentic-feeling, huge city. Not just authentic in its design, but authentic in

its vibrant atmosphere, an effect achieved through the actions of its pedestrians right down to the detailed and carefully considered ambient sound effects. It was an absolute triumph of design.

So yes, it was a great game and, as with so many such great games that sell ridiculous amounts, it's been blessed by extra material, namely the two new

episodes: *The Lost and the Damned* and *The Ballad of Gay Tony*. Both of which, naturally, were feverishly received as yet more proof of the original game's god-like status. And from March, we PC gamers be able to take a more reasoned view of the new episodes.

## HARD GUY

Like your usual expansions, the *Episodes* don't feature any vast changes to what went before. You're going to get more of what you had before, but this time you're getting it with the usual Rockstar flair and panache.

There's even a bit of controversy to be getting on with too, with fans of full frontal male nudity in for a treat. In general, both expansions bring the same



At Liberty City's Skinhead Convention.



How naughty.

sort of thing to the table, but let's have a look at the specifics.

*The Lost and the Damned* came first and brought a slew of new weapons to *GTA4*: grenade launchers, automatic pistols and a broken pool cue add to the fun. It also adds a new protagonist: Johnny Klebitz, a member of The Lost Motorcycle Club. His tale is one of loyalty, betrayal and riding on bikes listening to extreme metal (see Cavalera Conspiracy).

You'll be doing this for a relatively long time too, as there's around 10-15 hours worth of play here, not including

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Two new storylines
- ✓ Exciting new multiplayer
- ✓ Extreme metal
- ✓ Launch should be smoother...
- ✗ ...but we still worry



"Barry, do you use Timotei?"



## THE STORY SO FAR... GANGS OF GTA



**FORELLI FAMILY**  
The Forelli's refused Tommy Vercetti's claim of independence.



**LOCO SYNDICATE**  
This drug cartel took on Carl Johnson's crew in *San Andreas*.



**YAKUZA**  
Believing in honour, the Yakuza are betrayed by all and sundry in *GTA3*.



**THE LOST**  
The Lost are a biker gang facing a struggle for their very survival.

1986

1992

2001

2008

"You hand over the cash, then we hand over the Fabergé eggs."

## THE CAVALERA CONSPIRACY Metal comes to town

For metal fans, the most exciting thing about the incoming material is the introduction of Max Cavalera (ex of Sepultura, Soulfly and others) to *GTA4*'s DJ list.

Appearing on Liberty City Hardcore, Max presents a show dedicated to extreme metal, featuring the likes of Cannibal Corpse, Deicide, Entombed, At The Gates and his own ex-band Sepultura's song *Dead Embryonic Cells*.

The perfect soundtrack to screaming along a highway on a chopper, blasting passers-by with a shotgun.



Luis Lopez guards Gay Tony.



Expect plenty of explosions when *The Lost* ride into town.

## "The Episodes return to the *San Andreas* way of doing things"

the new multiplayer modes, of which Chopper vs Chopper looks to be the most interesting one. Perhaps taken straight from the *Multi-Theft Auto* mod series, this is where one guy in a helicopter chases another on a bike, attempting to prevent the latter from getting through a set of checkpoints.

### GAY GUY

The second episode is *The Ballad of Gay Tony*, which also introduces a new protagonist, one Mr Luis Fernando Lopez.

Like *The Lost*, *Ballad's* storyline is extensive and sometimes interweaves with that of the original game. For example, this one starts out with your character, a member of the Dominican drug cartel and bodyguard of the titular

Gay Tony, trapped in the bank Niko Bellic robs, *Heat*-style, in the middle of the main game's plot.

As well as the new story, a few other things were either introduced or brought back from previous games, such as the base jumping from *San Andreas* or the ability to replay missions to achieve a better score (the first time this has appeared in the series since *GTA: Chinatown Wars*). Other than that and a few new mini-games, the main change was to make the game a bit more light-hearted, again returning to the *San Andreas/Vice City* way of doing things.

One of the criticisms of the original *Grand Theft Auto 4* was that it was bipolar – a serious story mixed into the ludicrous, comical world of *Grand Theft*



"Tag, your it!"

*Auto*. Gay Tony leans more to the latter side of things and will be a bit of light relief for players.

When all's said and done, it's just a question of how well the *Episodes* will be transported to the PC, rather than how good they're going to be. We know how good they are from playing the console releases, but the PC release is usually the definitive version, with better visuals,

radio options and such. We'd like to think Rockstar have learned plenty of lessons from the debacle of *GTA4*'s original PC release, hoping this gets a much smoother introduction to our beloved platform. Nobody wants the memory of *GTA4* to be soured permanently by a shoddy port, so it's important Rockstar do their creation justice and give us something to remember it fondly by. **PC7**



MURDER YOUR GRANDAD...

STOCKHOLM,  
SWEDEN

# ENTERING THE WORLD OF PARADOX...

*David Brown* finds out what the plucky Scandinavians at Paradox have lined up

**T**HIS IS THE second time I've been to Sweden to see Paradox Interactive's annual games showcase thing. Last time out (*PCZ 206*) it was colder in the UK than it was in Scandinavia. This time, well, it was pretty much the same, despite the fact that snow was everywhere and most people were wearing those strange woollen hats with a big, big bobbles on them.

I didn't have a bobble on my hat, but I did have a variety of notepads, Dictaphones and eyeglasses ready to capture all the information needed on an extensive line-up of games, some of which turned my head, some of which didn't.

So in your name, dear reader, I spent five hours being talked at about games in a hot room in the basement of a four-star Swedish hotel, with copious energy drinks and strange little sweets called Dumles to sustain me.

First up were new Paradox partners AGEOD, who you might remember from such hardcore strategy games as *Birth of America*. My first thought upon seeing *Rise of Prussia* was, "Oh dear Lord, the stats, the STATS!" but I was won over gradually, mainly by the little portraits used to indicate units. It's a grand strategy game in AGEOD's tradition, but they're aiming to make it more accessible. It didn't look massively more

accessible, but the fact the scenario focused on is a lot smaller than their previous titles, it could well be easier to get to grips with what's happening.

Moving on from there, we had *Achtung Panzer*, which, despite the potential for comedy in the name, is a tactical war game in the *Close Combat* mould. Perhaps the most interesting thing about it was AGEOD's claim that every single tree, building or construct could be destroyed. See a bridge you don't want the enemy using? Blow it up. Think you're safe hiding in the building? Think again.

*Magicka*, developed by Arrowhead Studios, is an action-oriented adventure set in a Norse myth-inspired world. Beyond that, it's like *Diablo* with

Paradox's Stockholm.  
Weird, huh?



four-player co-op and an interesting spell system, which involves working together to maximise damage to opponents. For example, one uses a freeze spell while the other smashes the now-frozen enemy with an Earth one (like throwing boulders at them). If that's your bag, this could be one to look out for.

Time wore on and more games flashed before my weary eyes. An expansion pack for *Majesty 2*, called *Kingmaker* appeared, promising a map editor, an in-game shop and a new eight-mission campaign about a creature called Grum-Gog.

Next was *Mount&Blade: Warband*, which is prettier than last year's original, but still the same. The big addition is a 25 vs 25 multiplayer, which will include huge castle sieges that should be amazing when played properly. Defenders can fire arrows through slits in the walls and everything.

## KING RICHARD'S MEN

One of the games I was most interested in seeing, *Lionheart: King's Crusade*, was suitably impressive. The closest game to *Lionheart* is *Medieval II: Total War*, but it is significantly different from Creative Assembly's work. It's much more campaign-driven, with a relatively linear structure – finish mission, get choice of two new ones, continue. Battles won't just be a case of "one army rushes the other, lots die" either, with more narrative structure coming into play here too. If you play as the *Crusaders*, you get to choose from a variety of different approaches, depending on which of your backers

## MISCELLANEOUS MISCELLANY

The games that nearly slipped by, but didn't

There were a couple more titles that nearly slipped past the assembled mass of journalists and sweet-munching PR people. One of these, *Magna Mundi*, had virtually nothing on display, so it's difficult to judge how this will turn out. It's a *Europa Universalis*-style grand strategy game, if that helps. There was also *Sword of the Stars 2: Lords of Winter*, which also had very little to show apart from some

concept art of new ships and alien things. The developers spoke about how it wasn't going to be your run of the mill 4X sequel, but will involve you controlling an existing empire, rather than building up your own from scratch again. A new Leviathan class of ship is being introduced and things in general would be more complex. We can't say how complex, because we only saw the concept art, remember?

you listen to. You also get to think about pre- or in-battle strategy more, with deployable iron nails, catapults, oil slicks, and forests that can be cut down all coming into play, among other things.

The penultimate game was *Victoria 2*, a mind-bogglingly complex grand strategy game. Unlike *Europa Universalis* and *Hearts of Iron III*, this one is about social change, not just war. Paradox's Johann Andersson calimed to want to make it more accessible, before flicking to a screen filled with text, stats and numbers. Not the best way to promote accessibility, but it's better to remain obtuse than piss on fans to get an easy dollar.

Last up at the end of an exhausting day was Nitro Games' *Commander: Conquest of the Americas*. Fans of historical trade games will remember *East India Company*, a game to which this is a sort-of sequel. Trade and naval battles are where this is at, with luscious-looking water effects and the ability to be nice or mean to natives. Like a

mix between *Empire: Total War* and *Colonization*, then. You even get to be the Swedes, which went down well with the local journo.

After all this, bleary-eyed and yet frazzled by energy drinks, we were whisked to a medieval-themed pub, where people with beards bellowed at us and performed tricks with fire. Platefuls of meat were forced upon us and we ended up at a rock club where a colleague passed out and had to be helped up to his room by two helpful PR folks.

The best bit about the trip, other than seeing said colleague try to go to sleep on the coffee table in the middle of the hotel reception, was when I found a chocolate bar in the airport called Plopp. The games? Yeah, they were pretty good too. **PCT**





ETA  
**EARLY  
2010**That's one  
powerful  
revolver.One dead Blaster  
coming up.The Trapper can  
lay bear traps.

4

**DON'T GET THE TWO MIXED UP...**

# LEAD AND GOLD

**David Brown** has a heart of lead and a sack full of goldDEVELOPER Fatshark PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive WEBSITE [leadandgold.com](http://leadandgold.com)

**F**AIR PLAY TO Fatshark, there is a lot of lead and a fair amount of gold in their game. Though not as much lead as we'd like, but I'll talk about that later. *Lead and Gold* is basically a Western remake of *Team Fortress 2*, with dynamite, six-shooters, Winchester rifles, and all sorts of other cowboy paraphernalia thrown in. It's not a full-on competitor for Valve's juggernaut; though it could never really hope to be. What it will be doing is an alternative, probing gaming orifices that might not be completely satisfied by Valve's opus.

Fatshark aim to do this by toning down the weaponry, and by this I mean the guns won't be that accurate from the hip. Don't worry, you're won't miss your opponent from a few centimetres away, it's just you won't be able to snipe

someone off a building with a six-shooter. You'll have to use the sniper rifle for that, but even then you have to focus your aim and prepare the shot. This is meant to prevent the *Counter-Strike* plague of people no-scoping you from across the level while jumping in the air. Each class, of which there are four, will have a distinct play style to adapt to.

## CLASSY STUFF

The Gunslinger will have the six-shooter and can be deadly at close range, while the Deputy is best off used from a medium distance, as he wields the Winchester rifle. He can also tag opponents, which means a big symbol appears on your screen, indicating where said enemy might be laying in wait. If the Deputy dies, the icons

disappear (as it also does after a certain period of time).

There's also the Blaster, a bearded miner-type who wields a shotgun and throws dynamite about (like *TF2*'s Demoman once promised to). Finally, the Trapper is a sniper, but she can also (as befits her name) lay down bear traps to incapacitate unsuspecting players who might try to sneak up on her.

Another interesting idea is the concept of synergy, which is a kind of buff effect for your character and, most importantly, those around you. Stand next to a character with a maxed-out synergy and you benefit by proxy. Blasters reduce damage taken, while Deputies increase damage done. Each class has its own specific buffing effect (see Buff Buddies) and, when a team works and sticks close together, they become a force to be reckoned with.

This all ties in with the concept of the spawn flag. If a player picks up his team's flag, teammates can opt to spawn where he is (or back at the base, if so chosen).

This is all done in third-person, a decision probably taken to make playing on consoles easier. It works though, so

## BUFF BUDDIES

Friends help each other

### GUNSLINGER

The Gunslinger's synergy effect makes everyone around him more accurate.



### BLASTER

The Blaster is the tank of the game, and thus makes nearby allies resistant to damage.



### DEPUTY

The Deputy's buff effect will increase the damage done by those close to him.



### TRAPPER

The Trapper makes critical hits far more likely for those standing close by.



## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ *Team Fortress 2*-esque
- ✓ Only a tenner or so
- ✓ Wild West theme
- ✓ Uses Steamworks to the full
- ✗ Only 5-a-side



BUFFS... EVERYWHERE.

there's no need to fret. The only problem we really foresee is that it's only, at the moment, teams can only have five members, which is a little annoying. If the maps are designed well enough, it won't be an issue, and we're sure some enterprising individuals will mod the game and change this very quickly.

*Lead and Gold* is only going to cost around a tenner, will be download only, and will feature a huge raft of *Steam* achievements and maybe even some *TF2*-style hat/gear unlocks in the future. One to keep an eye on, certainly. **PC2**





RIDING HIGH AMONGST THE WAVES...

# SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES

David Brown is akin to a rusted, decrepit supertanker

DEVELOPER VSTEP PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive WEBSITE shipsim.com

**W**HEN YOU IMAGINE pursuing a career in games journalism, you take on board the fact you might be writing about games you have no interest in and then having to fake it to both the readers and the developers. This is what I thought I'd have to do with *Ship Simulator Extremes*, a game about sailing, ships and water – none of which I'm at all interested in. Another thing about the games industry is that sometimes you find things that you think you'll hate that turn out to be mind-blowingly cool.

Like *Ship Simulator Extremes*, in fact. So "mind-blowingly cool" is a bit over the top, but the fact you can sail an ultra-realistic recreation of the Titanic

around a sea full of icebergs is more than enough to pique our curiosity. Indeed, this is just one of many features that push the game from cheerful eccentricity into potential greatness.

The basics are all there, of course, thanks to a rock-solid simulation engine that's so comprehensive the US Navy uses it for navigation training. This new edition in the long-running series may be pushing things into the realms of fun, but in no ways are corners being cut or ridiculous compromises being made. For the aficionado, all the hardcore elements are in place, but for other people, the game's also got some more fun elements.

## LIFE ON THE WAVES

For example, there's going to be full-on storylines and event-driven campaigns. Add to this a whole raft of interesting features, like co-operative multiplayer missions, Greenpeace missions to save whales from despicable hunters, a big-

time editor suite and stunt courses! Yes, stunt courses. You even get to walk around on the deck and in your ship, where the crew get busy with their work as you stare at them.

There's even a stealth mission, where you have to locate and photograph a top-secret facility. This and many of the other scenarios are based on real events, with (natch) the real ships available to sail about in, including a Greenpeace vessel that haven't even been put out to sea yet (the Rainbow Warrior 3, to be precise). And, of course, there will be hundreds of other vessels to sail about in as well, like mammoth tankers, hovercraft, coastguard cutters, tugboats, cruise liners and powerboats (for the previously mentioned stunt tracks, no doubt).

What VSTEP are trying to do is open things up to a wider audience, and, if

## SAIL IN STYLE

Meet the SpaceOrb 360

We see a lot of junk here at Zone Towers, but when we find a fully realised ship control system, our eyes pop open so much, the glistening orbs nearly fall out of their sockets.

The Ship Control Unit has 26 programmable buttons, aluminium throttle levers and steering bar, plus "idle detent for throttles and steering bar to easily feel the neutral position". What more could you ask for? And it's only £349! Bargain. (That's £305 in proper money.)



you judge me as being representative of said audience, they may well have succeeded at already. It's still just sailing though, and as such runs the risk of being one of those games people go "that sounds great!" about, but then never buy or play. What is certain is that it's at the very forefront of simulation games, demonstrating what can be done when effort and dedication is put into a project. And for that, let's hope it makes a big splash when it comes out in June this year. **PCZ**



## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Stunt courses!
- ✓ Hulls that rust!
- ✓ Co-op!
- ✓ Scenic locations
- ✓ Storyline and true event campaigns
- ✗ It's still just sailing

ETA  
JUNE  
2010



Be the Coast Guard in rescue missions.

Sydney, yesterday.

Check out those waves.



ETA  
**OUT  
NOW**My, what a big  
saucer you have.**"STO even makes  
newbies feel like a proper  
captain from the outset"****KLINGON-ING FOR DEAR LIFE...****STAR TREK ONLINE****Ensign Adam Glick** gingerly goes where many are bound toDEVELOPER Cryptic Studios PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE [startrekonline.com](http://startrekonline.com) PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 207

**F**IRST IMPRESSIONS ARE important, and *Star Trek Online* knows how to make one. You start on the bridge of a ship, watching out the window as a Borg cube (the hive-mind cyborgs' favourite ship) ominously scars your hull with lasers.

People are dying around you as you hurtle along corridors shooting Borg, and teleporting them into space, before you become, totally by accident, the most senior member of the ship – and captain by default. This leads to a space battle,

a search-and-rescue mission, and a flurry of back-patting from your superiors, who sound a little too surprised that you're both alive and a good pilot.

Before starting the tutorial, of course, you're able to customise your captain to a ridiculously minute level, choose a class, and name your ship. Soon after you arrive on Earth's space station, you're even given the ability to customize some aspects of your craft itself, down to what kind of thrusters are on the back and what colour the top is.

**BJÖRN BORG**

This is a great start for *STO*, and even makes newbies feel like a proper captain from the outset, rather than being the Federation's whipping boy (as one might expect) for the first few hours. In fact, the game does the opposite – you're thrust eagerly into a dazzling array of

star systems, nebula and planets before you even really know what's going on.

The crux of the game comes down to the classic MMO formula of going to a mission-giver and going off to save the galaxy/some miners/harvest some space gas. The difference in *STO* is that your adventures are split into two distinct areas – space and away missions. For the most part, you'll spend your time behind the wheel of your craft, either flying across Sector Space to travel to a destination or in combat. Piloting the craft takes a little getting used to – particularly because you control its speed and pitch in three dimensions, and depending on where your ship is in relation to a target, particular weapons may not fire.

Qu'nos star  
stand-up comic.**THE LOWDOWN**

- ✓ A new *Star Trek* universe
- ✓ Pirates'-style ship combat
- ✗ Naff away team missions
- ✗ Generated missions are bland
- ✗ Riddled with bugs





2004



2007



2008



2009



## "Ship-to-ship combat is good enough to be a game in its own right"

Stellar combat works much like *Sid Meier's Pirates!*: you attack by activating certain weapons, but each one fires in a different arc, and each shield has four sections – front, both sides, and aft. For example, your fore and aft phasers can both be fired at once if you turn your ship's side to face the enemy. However, once you bring down their shields, you'll have to turn your ship, so its bow faces the gap in their defences to unleash devastating proton torpedoes.

Depending on how large the battle is you may also be taking fire from any side. You can, as a result, control power to your shields, forcing energy into areas that are being damaged the most.

This sounds a bit intimidating – over-complex, even – but you'll quickly get the hang of it. In fact, it's about the perfect system to really nail that classic *Star Trek* battle – tactical, ponderous, and with plenty of frantic button tapping. It's surprisingly absorbing and, in the controlled chaos of the larger fleet battles, it can get rather dramatic.

Really, the ship-to-ship combat is good enough to be a game in its own right, once you begin to get deeper into modifying your ships. Once I'd progressed further into the game, my entire space tactics had changed. Instead of sweeping around enemy craft seeking to



## CLASSLESS SOCIETY

What *STO*'s professions mean



During away missions, the abilities of *Star Trek Online*'s professions fit into the classic categories from your average MMO of either mitigating or causing damage.

The Engineer splits into Technicians, who debuff and damage enemies; Fabricators, a pet class that uses turrets; and Combat Engineers who blow up things.

The Scientist is decidedly more boring, with a Medic healing, a Scientist playing shaman with buffs to the player and damage-over-time attacks on enemies, and a Researcher that uses area-of-effect buffs and attacks that can cause friendly fire.

Finally, the Tactical professions are your Ranger (Soldier), Tank (Security) and Rogues classes (Special Ops).

These all branch out as you level, giving you access to different abilities – on the ground and in space combat – and ships, depending on the path you choose.



**GO AWAY!**

Bridge Officers take the place of troublesome social interaction

Throughout *Star Trek Online* you'll find yourself gaining Bridge Officers through quests, trades and vendors.

Each one is an AI-driven NPC from one of the professions. Each has their own abilities that level independently of yours: one for space, and one on the ground. In space a Tactical Officer can let you fire two proton torpedoes in one shot, whilst an Engineering Officer can MacGuyver your ship mid-flight and repair hull damage rapidly. Likewise, on the ground said officers will be able to kick the enemy in the shins and protect you.

On the ground, they react relatively intelligently to what's going on around them. They'll heal both you and each other, and even any NPCs or other group mates. It's an interesting replacement for guild mates for the solitary gamer, and when it works, it works very well indeed.



It's so embarrassing when you turn into a ship in a hallway.



Beam me up, Simon Pegg.

## "Once *STO* tries to be a normal MMO, it doesn't totally succeed"

wear them down, I'd charge at them, my new disruptor cannons ripping open their shields before a few torpedoes blew them up.

**CANARY WOLF**

You should also note I'm not the biggest *Star Trek* fan – I know Klingons and Vulcans and that's about it. That said, I found myself whooping madly as I took part in a gigantic open Fleet Defense outside Starbase 24, huge groups of Federation crafts bringing down Klingon Birds of Prey with controlled strikes.

I have to applaud how well Cryptic have done with the space combat – it

takes up a large chunk of your time, and it's more engrossing and tight than any MMO I've played in memory. From 50-ship, epic space wars to two-ship scraps, the combat staves off repetition by being addictive beyond the simple gaining of loot, experience and killing of enemy NPCs.

Which is a good thing, really, because once *Star Trek Online* tries to be a normal MMO, it doesn't totally succeed.

Levelling up in *STO* is a bizarre mixture of skillpoints, ranks and titles. There are five titles, each with 10 ranks, similar to *Dungeons & Dragons Online*. Instead of using experience, you gain



Keep an eye on your shields at all times, or you're dead.



Grouping in space can be infuriating.

nebulous amounts of skill points that gain you ranks. Graduating to the next title, however, requires the expenditure of different amounts of skillpoints.

These said skill points are spent in various areas divided by your class, and further divided into both spaceship and on-the-ground character abilities. As if this wasn't confusing enough, you also get away team members who you level up independently and gain different abilities in space and planetside.

While Cryptic may have wished to keep in character in this system, all they managed to do was obfuscate what should have been a very, very simple way

to level up. The class system makes a little more sense (see Classless Society), but is still needlessly complicated by menus and arrow-boxes, similar (yet not quite as bewildering) to *Star Wars Galaxies'* infamous stat-fest.

**JEAN-LUC PILCHARD**

Ironically, once you arrive on the surface of any given planet with your away team, the game becomes dull in its simplicity. Where *Tabula Rasa* attempted to bring at least a semblance of shooter-style aiming, the ground combat feels like it's from 2005, with errant tapping of abilities and waiting for that one specific ability to cool down.

Furthermore, many of your weapons are phasers, assault rifles and the like – but many enemies blunder towards you and awkwardly swing at you. It stinks of a 'me too' section of the game that Cryptic just felt that they had to include to appease what people believed an MMO had to be.





It's not even that it's totally awful – in fact, with the remarkably intelligent away teams (see *Go Away!*), it can be a kind of cack-handed fun – it's just awkward and anachronistic in a way that won't make anyone smile.

## JAMES T CURT

Sadly, this isn't the only problem with *STO*. The 'Genesis' missions – randomly-generated exploration tasks much like those found in *Spore* – can border on awful. One had me stuck on a randomly named planet where I had been told to look for gas. However, when I arrived, I was looking for a medical crate. After 30 minutes of listless searching – there were no map prompts – I had scanned three rocks. From discussions with other players, this is rather indicative of these somewhat lifeless adventures.

Another had a party and I save a planet of people displaced by the war with the Klingons – but, unluckily, they had been invaded by the Klingons again. On arriving, we watched as every single enemy – around 10 of them – spawned in one spot, stumbling upon each other like flies on a poo. Any attempt to break



them apart unleashed them all upon you, killing most of the party in one fell swoop.

The reason that I harness both of these examples is that they're not aberrations – *Star Trek Online* is, less than a month before release, critically bugged. Much of the time, when you enter an area on foot, you'll spawn as your space ship, awkwardly spinning until you turn back into a human – and

vice versa in space. Sometimes, you'll spawn on a planet with no away team – against hordes of enemies that cannot be killed solo.

Many missions are unbalanced to the point of ridiculousness. For example, it's common you'll be told to patrol an area of space made up of four or five systems. Out of these, two will be easily solo-able and take all of five minutes to complete – the next may be ball-breakingly hard with no warning. One 'level 4' mission may be far harder than another – and it seems that after the initial newbie missions you're thrown into a world that demands a space fleet to compete in.

## LT. UH-HUH UH-HUH

There're plenty of smaller bugs, too – not being able to pick an instance to enter (the menu disappears), some parts of the map still have HTML code on them, and,

occasionally, your map in an instance appears as a garbled, corrupted mess.

Well-documented and pervasive bugs, like your away team not spawning, continue to plague the game well into the latter stages of the open beta, and said bugs give the entire package a messy and ill-prepared feel. While the ship combat remains satisfying and addictive, the ground combat is turgid and unoriginal. Content fails to scale as evenly as you'd like, and reliance on groups grows at a faster rate than is comfortable – mere hours into the game, you're constantly running afoul of higher-level corvettes and cruisers with no wingmen to help.

While it's impossible to say this for sure, given the proximity to launch, it's very hard to recommend an immediate voyage to *Star Trek Online*. You'll want to wait a while before thinking about beaming down. **PCZ**





ETA  
**SPRING  
2010**I bow to your adeptness  
with sparklers, sir.**IT'S COMING HOME...**

# TWO WORLDS II

**Jon Blyth goes from 'Allo 'Allo to "Well hello" – the game with the dodgy script is making a smouldering comeback**

DEVELOPER Reality Pump PUBLISHER TopWare **WEBSITE** [twoworlds2.com](http://twoworlds2.com)

**N**EXT TIME YOU'RE listening to a Kate Bush album, imagine her singing in the voice of an East European who, through no fault of his own, isn't very good at English. Then, imagine that the lyrics to *Wuthering Heights* were "Your hungry and warm temper resembles my jealousy". That was the first and insurmountable obstacle that stood in the way of *Two Worlds* gaining any serious mass appeal. That and the fact it was released at the same time as *Oblivion*, which – in stark contrast – had Patrick

Stewart coughing up thespian velvet into your lugholes.

Topware and Reality Pump have learned their lesson. The Polish devs are now focussing where their peculiar strengths lie – the development of the Grace Engine. Mirek Dymek is the technical director, and the Americans at Topware talk about him in awed tones. From the reverential talk of his extreme coding skills, you'd expect an emotionally reclusive savant – so when Mirek finally enters the room, it's a relief to see a smiling, big-faced gentleman with a charming line in self-deprecation and a down-to-earth attitude to prostitution ("While I can get it without paying for it, I will.")

## PRETTY ROCKS

So, there's plenty of eye-glazing talk about dynamic light sources, 3D surfaces and polygons – but even a casual glance

at the screen confirms that considerable work has been done on the old girl. Stone walls look like they're made of tangible rocks, and they like to flout Health and Safety by suspending flaming torches from chains, at a height that allows you to bump into it. "Look!" you can almost imagine them saying, "that's dynamic lighting and physics ON SCREEN AT THE SAME TIME!"

Meanwhile, the script and plot has been moved completely to America, where producer Scott Cromie commands his team with eloquent passion. Quizzed on his own gaming preferences, he cites emotional twists like Aeris' death in *Final Fantasy VII*, and Sony-exclusive button-tapper *Heavy Rain* as being his areas of interest, and promises similar shocks and engaging storylines in story for players of

No woman ever  
believes that claim.

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Great new engine
- ✓ Acted by native English speakers
- ✓ A more recognisable storyline
- ✗ The faces are a bit slick



## THE STORY SO FAR... REALITY PUMP



**EARTH 2140**  
The game most notable for its popularity in Turkey.

1997



**WORLD WAR III:  
BLACK GOLD**  
Underappreciated and mostly unavailable.

2001



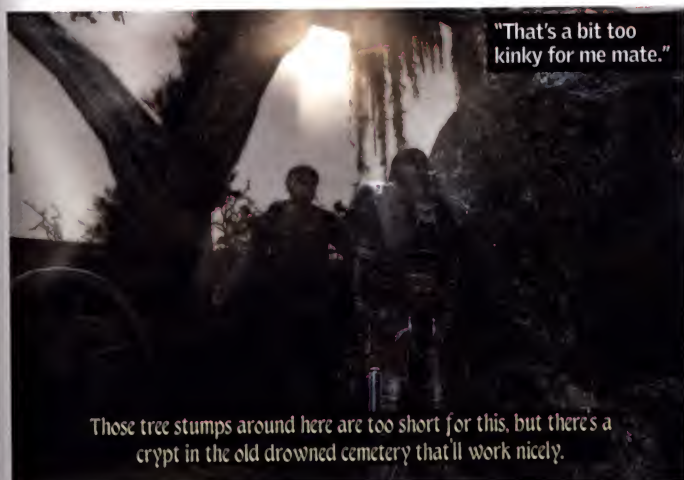
**KNIGHTSHIFT 2**  
Another forgotten, yet adequate game from these Poles.

2002



**TWO WORLDS**  
It's about time Reality Pump's luck changed to be honest.

2007



"That's a bit too kinky for me mate."

Those tree stumps around here are too short for this, but there's a crypt in the old drowned cemetery that'll work nicely.



Hyenas? How very unfantastical.

## BROTHERS IN ALCHEMY

One of the forgotten promises from the first game was a unique and intriguing feature. When mixing ingredients to make one of the thousands of possible potions, the original intention was to let you name any brew that you were the first to mix. The opportunity for user-generated filth is immense, and we genuinely hope this feature makes it in, this time.

After all who could resist a snigger at finding a bottle marked "Witch's Jissum."



Oooh, pretty!

Don't you know to be quiet in a library?

*Two Worlds II*. His Californian movie sensibility and gaming passion can't hurt the *Two Worlds* storyline – although, in the case of *Heavy Rain*, we'd hope for a little more interactivity.

## JAIL BREAK

The story takes place as the villain of the first game, Gandohar, returns to the world. A battle rages outside the castle, as you're thrown into a dungeon. As Gandohar is ignorant of the fact that dungeons are famous settings for escape tutorials, you promptly break out with the assistance of a female Orc called Dar Pha. Fans will know that *Two Worlds* is named after the conflict of Orcs and Humans, so this is an early sign that the old boundaries are soon to shift – not

only that, but you're taken to meet an old enemy.

One thing that's looking easier to grasp is combat. Another weak point of the original, it's looking more tactile now, with your development along the three classes of Mage, Archer and Swordsman open as you progress, and you can quickly swap between three outfits to suit different tasks encourages you to take a balanced path. Purists can still specialise, and reassign their points later if they've levelled down a blind alley.

**"Add necromancy, and you'll conjure a zombie who spits out loads of heat-seeking fireballs"**

The stacking system of the first game, which allowed you to bind a hundred daggers together to make a really kick-ass dagger has been replaced by a system of disassembly into raw materials that can upgrade your favourite weapon. It still doesn't make physical sense, but in terms of gameplay, it means everything you find could have a use.

Meanwhile, a lot of the fundamentals of the world are the same – spellcasting and potions are still a matter of combining items you find in the world.

Spellcasting involves placing cards into an amulet, and Cromie describes the deep flexibility of the system. Add the projectile properties of a missile card to the elemental fire card, and you've got yourself an everyday fireball. Add heat-seeking, and it'll become a homing fireball. Add multi-blast, and the effect will multiply. Then it gets weird: add necromancy, and you'll conjure a zombie who spits out loads of heat-seeking fireballs. The only limit is your ability to cast complex spells, and your mana reserves. Can it work as well as they say? Well, if you can't imagine how something might work in a game, there's always a possibility that it won't.

Still, there's so much positive progress on display that Topware and Reality Pump should get the benefit of the doubt. They've not only acknowledged their mistakes, they've taken huge and identifiable steps to fix them, and *Two Worlds II* is looking like it deserves serious attention. **PCZ**





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TAKING THE TRAIN...

# METRO 2033

"Could this be the future of the Tube?" wonders David Brown as he readjusts his gas mask...

DEVELOPER 4A PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE [metro2033game.com/en](http://metro2033game.com/en) PREVIOUSLY IN issue 216

I HAVE A penchant for things Russian. I've read a number of books on Stalin, Lenin, Rasputin and other kooky Russians (yes, I know Stalin was Georgian) funsters and this also extends to games. As you'll be able to read further on in this weighty tome, I'm back in Russia (yes, I know *STALKER* was set in Ukraine) for some more partying down with the perestroika posse.

First though is *Metro 2033*, a game from a team formed from deserters from camp *STALKER*. 4A wanted to make their own game, one that would see them break away from the world of radiation, mutants and crude

weapons made out of corrugated iron and ball bearings.

That didn't work out, so they instead concentrated on making the very best radiation, mutants and ball bearing gun game they possibly could. Now, as it gets closer and closer to release, we're being allowed to re-enter the below-ground world of *Metro* to see how it's shaping up, and whether 4A has a *STALKER*-beater on their hands.

While the obvious comparison is with *STALKER*, people who look a bit harder will see that, despite superficial similarities, *Metro 2033* is nothing like that open-world shooter. This game is much more like *Call of Duty*, being a linear FPS.

While this game has radiation, mutants, and a desolate, decaying feel, it's not set outside, like GSC's *STALKER* series, and definitely does not involve any roaming about looking for preternatural junk in wibbly wobbly anomalies. (This is in



Hounslow by night.

ETA  
MARCH  
2010

spite of an NPC crouching over a corpse at one point and muttering "Stalkers..."

We also spotted a pile of *Metro 2033* novels in an early location. Two chortle-worthy Easter Eggs indeed.)

Instead of traversing vast expanses of post-apocalyptic terrain, you have some of the darkest tunnels you've ever

seen. These underground locales are only lit by a companion's torch or, if you're alone, a flimsy, hand-cranked model you're lugging about. The fact you have to dig out a generator and manually bring your torch back to life is a great touch of realism, but one that'll be annoying if the flashlight dies during combat.

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Looks stunning
- ✓ Unique setting
- ✓ Russian voices
- ✓ Lashings of atmosphere
- ✗ Sludgy controls?
- ✗ Issues not been addressed?



This is as bright  
as it gets.



He's got binoculars  
on his hat!



**TAKING THE TRAIN...**

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THE STORY SO FAR...  
**GOING UNDERGROUND**



**THE TUBE**  
Oldest subterranean rail system in the world and the longest.

1863



**NYC SUBWAY**  
Moves more people than all other US subways combined.

1869



**PARIS METRO**  
Europe's second busiest. Influenced by Art Nouveau design.

1900



**MOSCOW METRO**  
A single ticket cost 5 kopecks (0.01p) when it opened!

1935



"Whoops, forgot my sunglasses."

We have seen all of this before (issue 216), so this time 4A were giving us a chance to see what's changed and whether issues we had with the game are being addressed or not.

We're still no closer to finding out what mysterious grub the pigs that live in the underground settlements eat yet, as for the game itself, we do know a whole lot more. It doesn't seem as if the strange dual-health system has been tweaked, which means your health will magically regenerate over time, while you can also still dig out a needle and jab yourself to speed this process up.

### SHOT IN THE ARM

Whether this is bad, contradictory or annoying is a matter of taste, with the argument that these syringes aren't health kits (although it acts an awful lot like one) but a 'stimulant kit' removing any reasonable complaints (after all, you're just speeding up the healing process) although it does take a long time to jab yourself. Perhaps it is just our thinking that is awry, that we generally believe in the standard 'heal while getting torn up' approach, rather than the preventative 'heal before getting torn up' one.

As for the minimalist HUD, it's safe to say that it seems

**"Instead of traversing vast expanses of post-apocalyptic terrain, you have some of the darkest tunnels you've seen"**

Air filters on gas masks have to be replaced after prolonged use.



What exactly  
is he firing at?

## SPEAK RUSSIAN OR DIE!

You positively have to play *Metro 2033* in its native language. It seems to be a more common occurrence now to have characters speaking in their real idiom, rather than with a standard American mid-west vocalisation. *Crysis* had its Korean soldiers, *STALKER*'s NPCs would often mumble in Ukrainian, and now *Metro 2033* allows for everyone playing it to be bombarded with Russian.

4A do need to make sure everyone is properly subtitled though, because there were a lot of missing bits of text in the build we played. Not good.



more sensibly implemented than before. All that's currently available is a little box in the bottom-right saying how many bullets you've got left in your gun and in total. And that's pretty much it for the HUD. When you use a health – sorry, stimulant kit a little symbol will also flash up to remind you how many you've got left. Other than that, the screen is clear. Objectives are checked by pressing M and reading a clipboard, your watch informs you of time left in your gas mask's filter and so on. Nothing's really that out of place or jarring, apart from the one thing we had the most trouble with: ammunition.

## AMMO CONSERVATION

Ammo is scarce enough that running out in each section is a serious risk. In one bit, you're meant to, but in others you're forced to ration as much as possible. But, again, this is perfectly acceptable in a crumbling, destroyed world where resources are at a premium and there are more pigs than children. Clearly ammo shouldn't be raining down from the skies. Still, it does seem strange to be stuffing your pockets full of bullets and to then be swiping away with your knife because you've run out. Another reason to conserve ammo is that it acts as currency in this world, so saving cash means getting handy with a blade.

**"Might surprise grizzled FPS veterans who are tired of the usual settings"**





As for the feel of the weapons, combat seems to be balanced between not knowing what the impact of your bullets against mutants is and feeling satisfied with how much they damage human enemies.

There's finally the issue of how everything handles. With a game that looks as good as this, you'll naturally be worried about how it's going to flagellate the insides of your machine and tear it to ribbons with all its high-quality shadows and other techy things that we don't really understand.

The good news is that the system we tested it on was able to handle it all well, apart from a slight sludginess with



Enough with the utter darkness already.



Don't cross this guy.

## "Stills just don't do it justice. Imagine a much more detailed version of *Modern Warfare 2*"

the mouse aim. I know, that sounds terrible as well, but it's really not as bad as you think. Unless 4A improve things, it may well just be a case of fine-tuning the mouse sensitivity more than usual. Whether this is a legacy of the fact this game is developed for consoles and PCs, so is also catering for pad users, only the developers will know.

Things have definitely been tweaked and changed since we last saw this game, but not as much as we'd have liked. This was perhaps inevitable, despite our initial optimism, but that doesn't mean you should dash your brains out on the pavement in despair.

Other than perhaps the mutants – the Dark Ones, to give them their official title – still having the tendency to get behind you too easily, even when backed into a corner, the game is great fun.

One of the reasons why is because it looks beautiful when running. Like many games nowadays, stills just don't do

it justice. Imagine a much, much more detailed version of *Modern Warfare 2* (set underground) and you're about there. Just like *Cryostasis* (issue 206, 80%), another Russian game that poured on the atmosphere, *Metro 2033* won't be a game you forget easily. Especially if you do flick the language setting over to Russian.

Just like watching foreign language films, listening to *Metro 2033*'s dialogue in its native tongue brings you into contact with the proper voice actors, rather than failed actor Joe Rent-a-voice from the 'burbs of LA, and adds layers of subtlety to the game's atmosphere and to the emotional ride you experience.

## STALKER IT AIN'T

So, despite all the little niggles we've still got with the game, work on *Metro 2033* isn't finished. We're still confident things we don't like will fall out of the game and things we do like will continue to get better and better.

As long as you don't go into it thinking "Ooh, another *STALKER*, great!" and remember it's not going to be like that at all – think of something like *Half-Life 2* – then we're confident you'll find it to be a great game.

*Metro 2033* looks slick and, if certain tweaks are put into place, might even surprise grizzled FPS veterans who are tired of the usual settings of World War II and the Middle East. Just like *Cryostasis* before it then, this could be one of those Russian games that catches us by surprise and sinks its mutated fangs into our hearts forever. Too poetic? Perhaps. **PCZ**

## THINGS THAT COULD BE GAMES

What other sources can Russian developers tap for new lines of games?



### GULAG TYCOON

Build up your very own political prisoner internment camp. Design your own snow shovels and guard uniforms, plus plan dissident repatriation programmes and plan work schedules. Bonus DLC will include a prisoner/scientist research lab.



### TROTSKY TEACHES TYPING

Coming soon to a branch of Staples near you, the world's first typing software that also

reinforces the concepts of permanent revolution as you use it. Ice pick only available in *Collector's Edition*.



### GLASNOSTBUSTERS

Squad-based shooter based on the adventures of four of the October Revolutionaries. Take control of either Zinoviev, Kalinin, Kamenev or Stalin as they battle the evil forces of freedom and democracy.

### SERGEI BUBKA'S POLE-VAULTING CHALLENGE

Face the ultimate test of agility, endurance and phallic implement-wielding as the greatest pole vaulter, and possible the greatest athlete, the world has seen ever teaches you the tricks of the trade, until you face off against your nemesis in a pole-off to determine who wins the Golden Pole trophy.





ETA  
**26 MARCH  
2010**



Autoglass repair,  
Autoglass replace!

**DOING IT FOR THE...**

# JUST CAUSE 2

When it comes down to it, there's nobody who loves swinging more than *David Brown*

DEVELOPER Avalanche Studios PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE justcause.com PREVIOUSLY IN 217

**A**GENT RICO RODRIGUEZ is what Tarzan would be if he was transplanted from his Johnny Weissmuller days, given a free shopping trip at Topman, and then shoved onto a tropical island, in the middle of a battle between rebels and a ruthless dictator, with the order to sort things out. He even still has his swinging ability, though instead of vines and going "Ah-ah-ah!" a lot, he uses a kind of bionic grappling hook.

We got a chance to test out how well Tarzan the secret agent swings in the run up to his launch into the public

sphere in March. And it turns out that he's swinging rather well, as it happens.

Let's do a quick recap for those who haven't been here very long. Rico is a secret agent, a sort of Hispanic James Bond, but with an even more uncanny ability to dodge death and defeat evil. His latest adventure takes him to the huge south-east Asian island of Panau, where Baby Panay is having his wicked way with the inhabitants.

As Rico runs amok through the various environments of Panau, he'll be getting involved with a twisting, turning plotline of deception, intrigue and dirty tricks, nothing of which we can reveal here, for both legal and moral reasons.

## FUN WITH A CABLE

Suffice it to say that Rico's adventure won't be an easy one, with hundreds and thousands of machine gun-toting enemies wanting him dead, blown-up and/or carved into little pieces. That's

what you'd expect. *Just Cause 2*'s not going to tear up the rule book in that sense, but what it is going to do is maybe cross out some sections and write some cool notes in the margin, most of which will have to do with the concepts of destruction and swinging (not that kind.)

First up is destruction. In our hands-on, we were given the chance to see



barrel, shooting it and watching the barrel rocket off into the air, dragging the unfortunate minion along with it.

Avalanche have seemingly nailed this element, a crucial and hat-hanging aspect of their magnificent octopus. It's going to be in this area that your core enjoyment of *Just Cause 2* lies. It's shaping up to be what *Mercenaries 2*

**"Zipping around pulling off high-risk manoeuvres is the core of the game"**

what happens at the beginning of the game, which involves falling out of a helicopter and parachuting into a well-fortified enemy base.

This provided a good initial section to really put the swinging action into practice. At first you'll naturally be a bit clumsy, but it won't take long before you're sweeping across chasms or tethering a bad guy to an explosive

wanted to be, but failed in doing so. You'll be able to use the grapple to cause loads of structural damage, not to mention the various comedy ways you can use it to inflict death on Baby Panay's goons.

Which is all well and good, but there's a little niggle. That niggle is that it might just be a bit too easy, a bit lacking in real challenge. Like the first game, you take farcical amounts of damage from the

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Loads of action
- ✓ Grappling hook is fantastic
- ✓ Fly a 737
- ✓ Doesn't take itself seriously
- ✗ Too hard to actually die?



THE STORY SO FAR...  
**AVALANCHE  
STUDIOS**



**JUST CAUSE**  
All the charms of skydiving and shooting in the same game.

2006



**THE HUNTER**  
What the world has waited for: a free-to-play hunting sim.

2009



**JUST CAUSE 2**  
Obviously, that's the game we're talking about on these pages.

2010



**AIONGUARD**  
Three years spent in development. Will it ever be seen?

TBC



"Excuse me, do you serve Tizer?"



No, no idea. Sorry.



"Surfin' USA."



...and from below.

throng of enemies pumping Rico with bullets. Farical in the sense of "hardly any". This was my main problem with the first one, so regardless of fixing all the other issues, which it seems as if they have almost certainly done, the one crucial element has remained.

There's a caveat here – the game was fixed on the easiest difficulty setting, so come review time, that statement could be proved hideously and utterly wrong. Let's hope so, because there's little worse than never feeling that thrill of danger or peril in an action game. Remove that and you've got nothing. There's too much to like in *Just Cause* for it to be spoiled by this though. Zipping all over the place, pulling off high-risk manoeuvres is the core of the game, but remove the high risk and you've got nothing.

This could be just the explosion-filled ticket many have been itching for, and could become the most fun we've ever had playing games. **PCZ**

## FIRE YOUR GUNS

There's a veritable treasure trove of guns to acquire in the game, ranging from your usual Uzis and pistols to a detachable mounted minigun. Bolted onto the large complement of death-dealing devices are a rocket launcher with laser-guided projectiles and a one-handed grenade launcher, for when you absolutely, positively have to be doing something else with your other arm. Carrying the detachable minigun perhaps. That's a dual-wield combination we'd love to see, it has to be said.

Also of interest might be the addition of a rather unusual new vehicle to the mix. Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Well, yes, it is. A Boeing 737 to be exact. Not the most nimble of aircraft to be flying about in on a covert mission behind enemy lines, but it does make for one hell of a fun starting point for a reckless skydive.

Just don't go crashing it into any skyscrapers.

The king of the swingers, the jungle VIP.



**BACK TO THE FUTURE...**

# MEDAL OF HONOR

**David Brown is ready to be called upon to do his previewing duty**

DEVELOPER EA/DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE medalofhonor.com

**I** WISH I had a medal of honour. You know, a big Iron Cross or... no, scratch that one. Just a round medal of some kind to show people how valiant, brave and heroic I am. Something to make me stand out from the crowd, like the military equivalent of a sideways Mohican. Make it razor sharp around the edges too, so I can use it to defend myself against my enemies and/or slash the throat of Russell Brand if I were in the same room with him.

We imagine the people who qualify to be Tier 1 Ops have lots of these medals. Enough to use them as shuriken, at least. They're so skilled and sneaky I'd never heard of them, which just makes Green Berets and Commandos look rubbish.

"It was unlocked you fool."

ETA  
AUTUMN  
2010

These guys are the best of the best, the elite storm troopers of freedom, born to be inserted into dangerous locales around the world, kill some goons and be back home for tea, crumpets and the odd

spot of consultancy on EAs' game projects, such as the relaunched *Medal of Honor*. Which is what we've finally begun to discuss.

It's been a long time since we were delighted by *Allied Assault*. Far too long. Since then, all sorts of pretenders have approached the *Medal of Honor* throne, to tip the ailing series onto the floor, plump the cushions

a bit and so usurp its place at the helm of World War II shooters. We've even had people being mown down in an airport with barely even enough grenades to do adequate damage to the civilians. That's not at all honourable and it's about time someone did something about it. EA and their Tier 1 Ops buddies are doing that.

## RESPECTFUL GAMING

The relaunched *Medal of Honor* is going to be all about authenticity and respect for the soldier, say EA. So it's unlikely



Apache in the sky.

we're going to see any bad Americans in this then, especially as it's set in Afghanistan. So EA are perhaps wise in steering clear of the controversy bandwagon. Making light of business types and holidaymakers being butchered in a fictional airport is one thing, but it's an entirely different kettle of fish to twang the public's jangled nerves about the current conflict in the Middle-East.

The real Tier 1 special ops guys, drafted in as consultants, won't stand for any disrespect of the armed forces.

Scenes have apparently already been cut or altered because of this, specifically one referring to the death of a soldier. Also they're refusing to reveal genuine military tactics (or, at least, some of them) because they

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Reboot of a classic series
- ✓ Controllable vehicles
- ✓ Big beards
- ✗ Very *Modern Warfare 2*

**"Medal of Honor is going to be all about authenticity and respect for the soldier"**



## THE STORY SO FAR... MEDAL OF HONOR



**ALLIED ASSAULT**  
The game that led to an explosion of beach-landing levels.

2002



**PACIFIC ASSAULT**  
Like Pearl Harbour, it wasn't an example of US greatness.

2004



**AIRBORNE**  
You could parachute into battle, but it really wasn't much fun.

2007



**MEDAL OF HONOR**  
Sand and beards will take the place of Tommies and beaches.

2010

refuse to compromise the position of individuals still serving in dangerous areas. Crikey.

The game itself though is, and let's be frank about this, another *Modern Warfare 2*. Certainly EA have already spoken about how there are going to be lots of scripted moments, like when your allies stack up around a door and kick it in. That'll all be scripted, at least until the wooden door splinters open and you get to shoot some terrorist's screwballs. We don't know if the shooty bit will be slow motion like in *MW2*, though.

### STAYING TRUE

Moving on from there, it goes without saying that you shouldn't go expecting any *OpFlash* or *Armed Assault*-style simulation antics here. *Medal of Honor* is going to be true to its roots, the ones that pioneered the Hollywood FPS type of game. Exciting set-pieces with rockets hitting jeeps, moving around the dusty streets of embattled Afghan towns,

growing your characters' beards to phenomenal lengths in order to infiltrate the enemy cells: it'll all be in there.

One of the big selling points EA are keen to play up is how you'll be playing as more than one character. (Yes, but didn't you do that in *Modern Warfare* as well?) Anyway, this might lead to a tighter, less stretched storyline than *MW2*'s, one of the main stumbling blocks found in Infinity Ward's magnum opus. It'll also have dedicated servers, which could be a line in the sand checkpoint between the two combatants. And, perhaps most excitingly, there will be drivable (and pilotable) vehicles, something the *MOH* team can definitely point to and look a bit smug about. There'll be obligatory static gun situations, but you'll at least be able to trundle about a bit. And the controllable attack helicopters look fun.

Despite our *MW2*-related concerns, we've got high hopes for this shooter. Remember we're talking about *Medal of Honor* here. So *Airborne* wasn't much



"Next person to put up a notice gets it..."

cop, but there's a history here, one that EA have made great noises about staying true to. Well, beyond changing the time, setting and, we presume, getting a recharging health system in there.

Even if *MOH* turns out similar to what's come before it, it should still be good. We know it's going to be cinematic, exciting, edge-of-the-seat action with even some stealth thrown in. There's going to be a load of vehicles and aircraft to control

and it's got some of the toughest people on the planet making sure it's all authentic (to a point).

If it can deliver a storyline that doesn't descend into silliness, there doesn't seem to be any real reason why EA won't cudgel its way back into the shooter arena with this one, especially when you consider that DICE are going to be handling the multiplayer side of things, which is exciting news. Look out *Modern Warfare 2*, the Tier 1 Ops guys are behind you, poised to snap your neck like a twig. **PCZ**



Changing Rooms, Kabul-style.

### BEARDS = BRILLIANT DISGUISES

How a big beard can help push back the forces of evil

You must have seen a member of the Taliban at one point. Well, you've seen Bin Laden then. He's got a big beard and so do all the members of the Taliban. So the natural and best way to infiltrate their ranks and remain covert in Afghanistan is to either don a big fake comedy beard or make like ZZ Top and grow one.

Your characters will have huge chin gloves and you might even be able to use them to your advantage, sneaking up behind an enemy and smothering him in facial hair. Which is certainly a gruesome way to die.



This is actually Keith Chegwin.



"Did I leave the oven on?"





Pretty green lasers  
equal red army death.



One supreme  
commander  
bites the dust.

**TAKING THE REINS AGAIN...**

# SUPREME COMMANDER 2

*David Brown usually orders waiters around*

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE [supremecommander.com](http://supremecommander.com)

ETA  
MARCH  
2010

**B**IGGER DOESN'T ALWAYS mean better, they sometimes say, although of course this doesn't apply in all situations (try telling that to a porn star, for example). *Supreme Commander* was big, bold and suffered from that at times. It has numerous devotees out there, but there are also placard-waving haters who lie prone in the shadows, waiting for an unwitting fan to cross their path before pelting them with verbal abuse.

Going big in terms of unit numbers wasn't necessarily the most popular idea

ever. Gas Powered Games' Chris Taylor has addressed this in the sequel, reducing the number of units available to be built, primarily because – and you might get angry at this bit – consoles just can't handle the number of units the previous game threw at them.

"Sometimes your motivations for doing things aren't always ideal, at least theoretically at first," he says. That's just about right, but out of disaster often springs hope, and so seems to be the case with *Supreme Commander 2*. It's all about the problem of redundant units

and, now that we've had a chance to put Taylor's theories to the test, we think he could just be right. The idea runs thus: instead of building Tank 1 and then researching Tank 2 and the powerful Tank 3, you build Tank 1 and then upgrade it as the battle goes along, until you organically come around to Tank 3 in your own time.

This solves the system crippling performance problems, along with the general RTS issue of having loads of crud units left cluttering up the place, eating into the unit cap. Now, let's get this

straight – this doesn't mean you won't be commanding large forces. We're saying you won't be commanding ridiculously large forces. How you acquire those units and technology should remain pretty much the same, though.

## RTS FARMING

There's still going to be Energy and Mass as the only two resources you can harvest and you've also still got the strategic zoom thing, which is still lovely. It's also more manageable now, because of the fact you've got less units to be fiddling about with. However, one might also sound a note of caution here – perhaps some will think it's less necessary now because of this very paucity of units? Just a thought.

What there will be more of is storyline, although as we've only played a section of the game at the time of writing. The campaign mode starts off

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ No performance issues
- ✓ Chance of real teamwork
- ✓ Tactical zoom still there
- ✓ More effective unit system...
- ✗ ...that some might not like



Stompy.



Navies are  
still around.



## THE STORY SO FAR... GAS POWERED GAMES



**DUNGEON SIEGE**  
Best bit: a pack mule that gave you more baggage.

2002



**SUPREME COMMANDER**  
Became the best huge robot RTS around.

2007



**SPACE SIEGE**  
Compelling and fun, even if it was clichéd and repetitive.

2008



**DEMIGOD**  
Some adored it and some were perplexed by the whole shebang.

2009



Transformers, anyone?



Looks painful.



Explosion fever!



Research fever!



Reds vs Blue, the eternal conflict.

with you playing the role of some guy called Dominic Maddox, the bloke in the armoured command unit (ACU). That's the big constructive robot thing that is the heart of your operation. If it gets destroyed, it's game over. At least you'll get to see a huge mushroom cloud erupt over the landscape, which is very, very cool indeed.

As Maddox, you've got to stop the menacing forces of the Cybrans, the race of once-human cyborgs from the first game who want to destroy humanity.

The plots twist, and you'll become so enthralled that you'll find it hard not to zoom in and out with glee.

It's the skirmish and multiplayer modes that are going to win the day for *Supreme Commander 2*. These are definitely the most enjoyable bits of the game we've tried out so far. What we hope will happen is the game will continue to forge the teamwork path in RTS circles, where players will band together and perform tactical roles on the battlefield.

## GETTING BUSY IN THE LAB

Experimental units can make all the difference

They might cost a lot in terms of resources and it might also take a while to get to them, but once you do lay your hands on the elite units in *Supreme Commander 2*, you'll be in a position of great power.

Our personal favourites at the moment are the giant squid-like submarine and the huge flying saucer that rains glittery laser death down on its enemies. A few of these lingering over a poorly defended base and it's goodnight for your opponent.

It's possible to see these experimental units as being overpowered, but each one has its counter unit, it's just a question of being able to produce it or have it in your arsenal when or if necessary.



## "This could be the next step in this style of RTS gaming"

For example, the largest multiplayer map – a four vs four conflict – involves a long, narrow land bridge with plenty of sea on either side. Four spawn points are located on each one and there's a great deal of scope for exciting tactical play if each player were to play a role – one producing air units, the other sticking close to enemy lines knocking up turrets and turtling, and so on.

### A NEW BREED

If you can get over the relative scarcity of units in comparison to the last one – and with the way this has been

implemented, it won't take a huge leap to do so – we've got a good feeling this could be the next step in this style of RTS gaming.

The engine shouldn't cause any trouble to pretty much any modern machine, as Chris Taylor says it should run on max on any machine that's 3-5 years old. As heavy system requirements were one of the main reasons why the previous game annoyed some players, Gas Powered Games should be onto a winner. If they can keep the bugs away, we're not even sure we need our fingers crossed on this one. **PCZ**



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**LINE IN THE SAND...**

# SPEC OPS: THE LINE

**To Michael Gapper the Heart of Darkness is a place in the sun**DEVELOPER Yager PUBLISHER 2K WEBSITE [specopsthegame.com](http://specopsthegame.com)

**B**UILT ON A foundation of sand and desperation, Dubai is a centre for business and tourism and is the jewel in the United Arab Emirates' crown. As oil supplies run thin, Dubai has risen to become a major economic power and has been designed to be at the very centre of western businesses' expansion into the Middle East.

The city plays home to the famous sail-shaped Burj Al Arab hotel, a series of man-made palm-shaped islands, a 16-lane superhighway, and the world's tallest building – the Burj Khalifa, standing at 828 metres high with 160 obscenely opulent floors. Tear it all to pieces and it

becomes the setting for a 21st century *Heart of Darkness*.

## URBAN DESERT

You know the story already: a man goes into the wilderness to retrieve a charismatic cult leader, fights for his life, and leaves the jungle forever changed. Hollywood took Joseph Conrad's novel and traded an out-of-

control ivory trader in 1890s Africa with an insane military hero in 1960s Vietnam and Cambodia, and called it *Apocalypse Now*.

*Spec Ops: The Line* isn't trying to do *Heart of Darkness* better; just different. Yager have taken Conrad's story and shifted it to a point in the very near future. In Marlon Brando's role they have the insane Colonel Konrad, while

Martin Sheen's part goes to Captain Walker. The jungle has been swapped for the concrete and sandstone of a ruined Dubai. The Doors have been traded for Björk, and the utter insanity of *Apocalypse Now*'s production has been replaced by stereotypical German efficiency and a small multi-national team working out of a studio in Berlin.

In the real world, sandstorms fill Dubai's streets with dust and make every window cleaner's life that little bit tougher, but in

Name that organ!

All soldiers have a magnetic attraction to concrete.

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ A never before seen location
- ✓ Based on *Heart of Darkness*
- ✓ Ten-player online multiplayer
- ✓ Solid cover shooter mechanics
- ✗ A very brown shooter...

**"You see the remnants of civilisation, the actions of Konrad's death squads"**



## THE STORY SO FAR... SPEC OPS SERIES



**LEAD THE WAY**  
Spec Ops kicks off. The Ranger Team Bravo add-on soon follows.



**GREEN BERETS**  
Spec Ops gets its first proper sequel. This was a PC-exclusive.



**STEALTH PATROL**  
Now defunct Runecraft made the first Spec Ops for PlayStation.



**THE LINE**  
This'll be Yager's first game since 2003's titular shooter Yager.

1998

2000

2010

*The Line* apocalyptic sandstorms have hit Dubai like a Roland Emmerich disaster movie, tossing cars from freeways, shattering every pane of glass in the most exposed skyscrapers, filling malls with sand, and forming dunes hundreds of feet high.

"All this was caused by savagery," says Colonel Konrad of the ruined city, but whose savagery he's referring to isn't so clear. There's Konrad himself – an American hero who held his soldiers behind to help evacuate the city's poorest people while the sandstorms rolled in, and a man who now treats Dubai as his own personal kingdom. There are the refugees who live like dogs in the city's malls and obscenely opulent hotels, covering in the ruins in fear for their lives.

The US soldiers under Konrad's command are savages too; 1,000 elite soldiers who crossed the line under

Konrad's orders, and formed death squads and use torture and execution to retain control. Finally, there's you – Captain Walker – armed to the teeth and fast turning the entire city into a war zone on your mission to extract Konrad and return him to the USA.

This is the stage for yet another one of those rock-solid third-person shooters which would have been revolutionary in 2006, but now sit alongside the likes of *Lost Planet* and *Gears of War*, in both its robustness and liking for beige.

This game is as simple and as gimmick-resistant as any third-person shooter, but for a reason.

*The Line* is instantly recognisable – every key does what you'd expect and every weapon behaves how you'd hope. You'll lock to cover, pop out and shoot,

and sprint to safety with controls ripped from *Gears of War*; you'll command your two-man squad using systems borrowed from *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *GRAW*; and you'll do it all in a world which is built from the ground up to be entirely foreign.

## SAND DEVILS

Walking across the sand you'll hear a grinding at your feet; you'll crouch and find that you're not on terra firma, but 50ft in the air on the glass roof of a hotel's lobby. Suddenly, you're under attack and there's nowhere to run but down. Turning your gun on the sand, the ground shatters and you fall – not 50ft onto leg-snapping marble, but 10ft onto a sloping dune which rolls you downwards straight into the reception desk. While your team fights up above, you fight Konrad's men from below – using your squad to spot their positions and your position beneath them to shoot out the glass, dropping them the full 50ft to the floor.

Dubai is *The Line*'s gimmick: it's the world's supermodern city where marble and polished glass contrast with rubble, towers collapsed beneath the weight of sand, and tented refugee camps within the homes and offices of the world's wealthiest people. Like *BioShock*'s Rapture, *The Line*'s locations can tell a story without saying a word. You see the remnants of civilisation, the actions of Konrad's death squads, and witness the ways the sand has remade the city. And like *BioShock*'s subaquatic city, Dubai is a city of choices.

You'll step into a mall to find Konrad's men lining Arab refugees up for execution – murdering every man and woman who refuses to give up Walker's

A shredded US flag flying over Dubai? How tactful.



ETA  
WINTER  
2010

Don't look up when you do that!



They really hate carpets.





# WHY DUBAI?

Every one of Dubai's iconic sights appears in *The Line*, delicately tweaked by the team to avoid infringing on trademarks and copyrights. You'll cross the Sheikh Zayed Road, fight in the Arab Sail, and very likely finish the fight in the tallest skyscraper in the world; sitting as it does near the far end of game's map. Like *Rapture*, *The Line's* Dubai is a place of incredible wealth and beauty, smashed beyond recognition and turned into a nightmarish landscape, making it the perfect setting for a retelling of *Heart of Darkness*...



## THE SHEIKH ZAYED ROAD

The Sheikh Zayed Road is the most famous section of Dubai's E 11 superhighway: 16 lanes of Land Rovers, BMWs, Ferraris, and the bastards who are rich enough to drive them, all hurtling along at 75 miles per hour. The road literally divides the city in two, and it was only recently that a monorail was opened to create a convenient path across it. In *The Line* this road forms the backbone of your path through the city, and it's a safe bet that it's a road you'll have to cross in the middle of a sandstorm.



## DOWN AND OUT IN DUBAI

While the landmarks are always visible it's in the less recognisable spaces you'll do the majority of your fighting. You'll climb to the top of tower blocks and fight your way back down through marble-floored halls and glass-walled offices; you'll tear through shopping malls and detonate 100 grand automobiles in car showrooms. Vulgarity is an art form in Dubai and conspicuous wealth is a part of everyday life, so much so that Yager had to add new modules to Unreal 3 to handle the sheer number of reflective surfaces found throughout even more common buildings.

## THE BURJ KHALIFA

Formerly the Burj Dubai, the Burj Khalifa opened in January to the sound of 10,000 fireworks, a slap on the back from the *Guinness Book of Records*, and the indifference of everyone who might want to open an office there. Like a coffin nail hammered into your gran's coffee table, the Burj Khalifa sticks out a mile (or almost a kilometre, at least) in the real world and in Yager's art. It's on Sheikh Zayed's first interchange in real life, but Yager place the tower far out, almost as if it's your final stop.


## THE BURJ AL-ARAB

The Arab Sail stands 320m tall on an artificial island at Dubai's edge, but as huge as it is it has only 200 rooms. The cheapest suites start at £900 per night while a deluxe suite brings the bill up to £4,000. For the seriously flush, the Royal Suite costs a cool £16,000 pounds per night, which works out at £2,000 per hour, £33 per minute, or 55p per second, for an eight-hour kip. For the same £33, you'll be able to run around it and shoot your friends for hours.



Dubai: City of obscene wealth.





Tracers, everywhere!

## "Sand is a constant factor in the game – shifting beneath your feet and flowing through any opening"

location. It's an execution you can stop with a single bullet, but that single bullet will throw you into a firefight which might cost you the lives of your men. Better to sneak to a better vantage point, but it's a vantage point which comes at the expense of a dozen innocent lives.

And so you fire. The executioner is taken out, but Walker and his men are thrown into an impossible fire fight. The sand dune obscuring the mall's glass frontage leaves the space in

impenetrable darkness as you fight your way towards a better position. Dropping down from the second to the first floor you take up the executioner's mounted gun and suppress Konrad's men, designating distant shots for your squad's sniper and controlling the situation just long enough to realise there's only a thin pane of glass holding back a 100 tonne of sand. A hail of bullets shatters the mall's outer wall and frees the dune to bury the hostiles, as shadow is replaced by rich orange

Are they staring into the blood-dimmed tide?

light cascading into the freshly-swamped mall.

Yager's team have ripped the guts from Unreal Engine 3 and installed new components which include a flowchart AI system which lets you exactly how the computer is making decisions and even tweak them on the fly, and a new system for managing the flow of sand.

Sand is a constant factor in the game – shifting beneath your feet and flowing through any available opening. Yager are promising to do for sand what *BioShock* did for water, and to that end they've built a system which will allow firefights to play out in the middle of sandstorms. Wind will alter the shape of the environment while the fight is in progress, new paths will form and others will be cut off.

### SPEC-ULATION

With the dune now filling the mall's ground floor, Walker and company step out into the city for a spectacular view of Dubai's Sheikh Zayed Road.

Konrad's men are already retreating by helicopter as Walker stumbles across a certain Captain Daniels hanging from a lamp post, tortured to death. Walker's team, it seems, were the second squad sent in after Konrad; the first squad falling victim to the savagery the Colonel keeps banging on about. Seconds later the reason for the soldiers' retreat becomes clear as a sandstorm rolls down the highway, blinding the squad, ending the demo,

What happened to good old M16s?

and making for a neat transition to the game's logo. Fancy.

Yager has taken a long time to get to this point. In the time since the Berlin studio released the self-titled *Yager* on Xbox and PC they've prototyped half a dozen ideas, collaborated with several publishers, and finally settled on reviving *Spec Ops* with 2K in 2008. Like Britain's own Rocksteady, they spent nearly five years fiddling with Unreal Engine 2 and 3 and have a mastery over the tech that few studios can match.

They're a small team formed by five East Germans who grew up playing whatever videogames made it over the Berlin Wall, and are genuinely excited to be working with a big publisher on a game which has triple-A written all over it. Their 40-man team is small by many developer's standards but the manageable scale keeps the team close – the AI team glance over their shoulders and make requests of the programmers, the programmers can shout across the room to the level designers, and the level designers are just a stone's throw from the team producing the game's art.

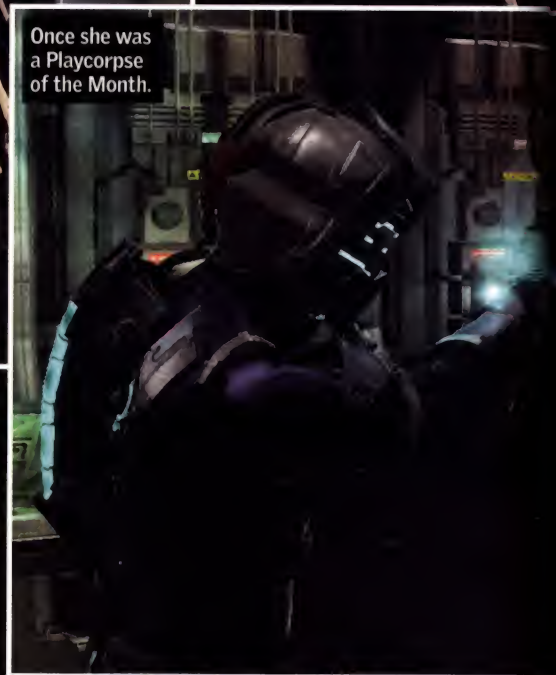
While Yager are busy trying to do for sand what *BioShock* did for water they might find themselves doing for Germany what Rocksteady did for the UK – coming from nowhere and immediately taking their place alongside the nation's most talented developers. **PC!**



Tut, kids today.  
I dunno.



Once she was  
a Playcorpse  
of the Month.



**FILLETING ALIENS...**

# DEAD SPACE 2

ETA  
**WINTER  
2010**

**Jon 'Log' Blyth dons his spacesuit and gets his cutting arm ready for some slicing and dicing**

DEVELOPER Visceral Games PUBLISHER EA [WEBSITE deadspace.ea.com](http://WEBSITE.deadspace.ea.com)

**P**RE-PRODUCTION WORK ON *Dead Space 2* has only been official for less than six months, but it was never in serious doubt. Isaac Clarke's first encounter with the alien virus that created the necromorphs

was a hugely atmospheric blend of action shooter, with grim tones of survival horror.

Admittedly, it was a survival horror in which you had enough bullets, and the exposition was clumsy. If I was dying, I'm not certain I'd use my blood to scrawl "Shoot off their limbs" on a nearby wall.

Discovering that you can only survive on a deserted spaceship by severing the limbs of members of your own mutated species can leave a man scarred, and Isaac was certainly affected by his time on board the Ishimura. Over the three

years that have elapsed since the first game, he's transformed from a faceless engineer with great aim and a snazzy line in helmets into a committed soldier, dedicated to killing necromorphs. That's why he finds himself in the Sprawl, a mining colony in the Rings of Saturn that's flourished into a cosmopolitan must-visit space destination.

## CULTS ARE BAD

There are three areas currently on display. You spend some time in The Church of Unitology, the religious cult that was behind the illegal operating

front in the first game, and the reason the Ishimura's crew went down with a severe case of post-life aggression.

For a space cult, they're pretty old-school, with a fondness for candles that'd embarrass a goth. Another striking scene is the entrance into the city on an elevator: the breathtaking ascent interrupted briefly when our companion has his breath literally taken from him, as a bloated necromorph tears him to shreds.

New mutations require new methods of brutal despatch. The defining weapon of the first game was the triple-

## THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Moody atmosphere
- ✓ Epic moments break the tension
- ✓ You get to melee dead babies
- ✓ Jetpacks and jetboots
- ✗ Potential awful mouse controls



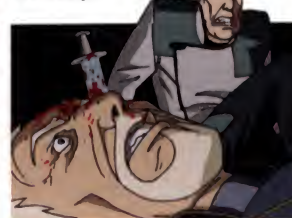
Isaac Clarke 2.0.

## COMIC RELIEF

A quick guide to the *Dead Space* canon

### DEAD SPACE (COMIC)

This was written by Antony Johnston, who also wrote the original game's dialogue. (Incidentally, a lot more talking was written than made it into the game, which is a shame – it lent to the mood of your isolation, and was good quality stuff.) Six issues of the comic tells the story of a P-SEC's officer's battle with a necromorph infestation of a colony.



### DEAD SPACE: DOWNFALL (ANIMATED MOVIE)

This covers the events on the Ishimura before Isaac Clarke arrived: the finding of the virus that causes a woman to commit suicide and be reborn, and the squabbles amongst cult members that led to widespread violence amongst the crew, who are overwhelmed by the reanimated bodies of the dead.

### DEAD SPACE: EXTRACTION (WII)

One thing the Wii does well is on-rails shooters. In this example of the genre the events of *Downfall* are semi-interactively retold. Playing this will be a surprise to those used to bowling with cutesy cartoon characters.

### DEAD SPACE (PC, 360, PS3)

The Kellion turns up, and against all sense Isaac Clarke and his repair team decide to board the ship. The same ship on which everyone who was on board has just been brutally killed, yet are still wandering around. When will people learn that this is always a bad idea?



### DEAD SPACE 2

Three years after Isaac shakes the blood and flesh of necromorphs off his boots, he visits the Sprawl during a necromorph attack. New mutants mean Isaac has new and interesting limbs to remove from their torsos.

barrelled laser gun, which was best aimed at the arms and legs of the necromorphs. Blow their legs off, and they'll find it significantly harder to reach you – and if they start dragging themselves over to you with their arms, lightly sever those, too. One of the new weapons on display is the javelin gun, which pins necromorphs to the wall like a biology experiment, allowing you to vivisect them at leisure. This weapon won't be so effective against the mutated baby monsters, however. Known as The Pack, they attack in

groups, making your javelin an unworkably slow solution. Might we suggest sir uses the flamethrower?

Secondary fire modes add variety: with the classic severing gun you could rotate the barrel, allowing you to aim more effectively at removing legs and arms. The javelin can be charged with electricity, saving you the bother of dismemberment, by frying the necromorph into a screaming wall-mounted firework.

The final scene we're shown is equally dramatic: an errant blast from

a plasma rifle shatters one of the outside-facing windows, creating an instant and lethal depressurisation. Everything is sucked towards the window, and Isaac only has a short opportunity to blast the safety shutters down, before he's flung into space. Happily, during this demo he's allowed to float outside. Luckily, the shutters trigger automatically. On a less positive note, Isaac's halfway out the window and is chopped in half. It's possibly an apt time to mention that the guy from Visceral let

"Severing the limbs of members of your own mutated species can leave a man scarred"



## UNITOLOGY 101

### A quick guide to the bad guys

As it stands, there's no reason to believe in religion. But in the future we might find loads of tiny string gods in the ninth dimension, or find out that the Sun is a massive eye that's so bright because it loves us. That's why Unitology's so exciting – it could be true! Brush up on your in-game religions with our quick and easy flashcards.

UNITOLOGY was founded by MICHAEL ALTMAN, when he discovered the **BLACK MARKER**. He managed to convince loads of people that it would give them **IMMORTALITY**. Everyone thought this was really generous and started **WORSHIPPING** him.

If you want to read **UNITOLOGY SCRIPTS**, it's a simple letter-symbol substitution code, that you can find in the game. A similar system is in operation on **FRENCH KEYBOARDS**, where they **NEEDLESSLY SWAP SOME LETTERS AROUND**.

THE **BLACK MARKER** is pretty mysterious – no-one knew what it did for 200 years, not even **ALTMAN**. However, when someone did finally figure it out, it turned out that the inscriptions were **RECOMBINANT DNA CODE** for the **NECROMORPHS**.

Climbing ranks in the **CHURCH OF UNITOLOGY** is a matter of making huge **FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**, and your body must be left intact after death. This helps **NECROMORPH DNA** turn you into a **WEIRD SPINDLY THING WITH ITS GUTS HANGING OUT**.

the bloated alien from the second scene pull Isaac's arms off. Anyone'd think he didn't like the guy.

These cinematic set-pieces are being dubbed "epic moments" by Visceral, and every chapter of the story will be punctuated by at least one. If you're not getting sucked out of a window and chopped in half, you'll be fighting huge bosses from the inside (see also: *Lost Planet 2* or *New Zealand Story*), and standing on top of a high-speed train,

fending off waves of necrotised human flesh. On one hand, it's a compromise in terms of pure, oppressive terror. On the other, it gives you a chance to add the occasional "whoo-hoo" to your well-rehearsed repertoire of "uh-oh" and "shitshitshit".

One of the design elements that made *Dead Space* such an immersive experience was the genuine lack of a HUD. It's something of a developer cliché to claim that you're "minimising

the HUD", but *Dead Space* did it with genuine style, working every last bit of information into the objects and technology of the game. Video logs, communication with your surviving team members, and operating your inventory was all done through in-world holograms. The action that doesn't pause for you to sort out your ammo, and nowhere was designated a safe place. That's all still in place – all the important information is still tucked discreetly away.

### AN ELTON MOMENT

The anti-gravity moments from the first game have changed too. In the first game, you barnacled yourself to a wall, and pushed in a direction, using your unguided flight path to spin around and shoot necromorphs who were travelling in similar straight lines. Since then Isaac has picked up a jet pack with a set of jet boots. It's not going to turn the game into a *Dark Void Rocketman* affair, but it does give you enough power to guide yourself through zero-G bits.

This means Isaac's travels around the Sprawl are a more open affair than the optionless tram system that ruled your progress through the slightly-too-similar areas of the Ishimura.

That's the greatest source of improvement in *Dead Space 2*'s new



"Look behind me?  
I'm not going to  
fall for that one."

## "These cinematic set-pieces are being dubbed 'epic moments'"



That's no  
choirboy.

The played looked  
was popular in  
The Sprawl.





I hope he's got a pilot's licence.

**"The sequel has Isaac acting more human, with him having to deal with people"**



Please don't get them out for the lads!



The joys of zero-G.

setting: variety. A just-begun thriving city offers locations far more interesting than a bridge, shuttle bay, and crew quarters. And its location – the Rings of Saturn, for Christ sakes! – makes for an infinitely wider array of settings.

## WELCOME CHANGE

Spacewalking across walkways is pretty much to be expected, but fixing up a solar array on the surface of a planet that's been cracked open with lasers, and mined for resources? That sounds like whole new league.

The defining mood of the first game was isolation – haunting space loneliness. You had contact with the two surviving crewmates from the Kellion, but mainly it was video logs from the

dead, and a positively frosty welcome from their corpses.

The sequel has Isaac being more human by dealing with people – we're early enough in the viral cycle to have pockets of desperate survivors on the Sprawl.

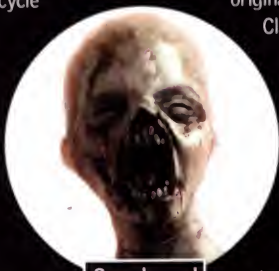
Guiding squads of survivors around would be a radical change of direction, and Visceral Games are cautious about suggesting this is a new direction. *Dead Space 2*, they say, will primarily be about Issac Clarke fighting the alien living dead by himself. But dealing with real people might give

the game an extra dimension to the original, and it certainly gives Clarke a reason to take his helmet off more often.

The constant looming threat of the first game is now tempered with regular moments of what street urchins might call "kickassery" – tension-breaking moments

in which you're empowered with the ability to blow all shades of shit right up.

What Visceral are doing with *Dead*



Say cheese!

*Space 2* appears to be taking it in a more cinematic direction, with new ways for the necromorphs to pervert the human form and unsettle the player, and more balancing moments to throw the moments of tension into relief.

Being a fan of the first game's relentless, heavy-footed isolation – even if the controls were abysmally ported to the mouse and keyboard – I'm looking forward to seeing how a world with more survivors and locations works out. It's got the potential to ruin the mood of the franchise, for sure, but it could also blow the game open into exciting new territories. **PCZ**





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# PCZONE

# Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

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### DUMP

(0-19%)  
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### EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



### ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.



66

## ALIENS VS PREDATOR

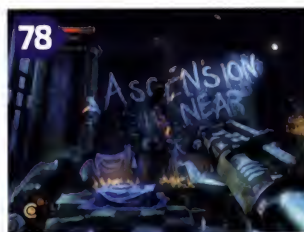
The triumvirate of terror returns. Is it as good as you remember?



74

### 74 MASS EFFECT 2

You've seen all 200 trailers. Can the game be as good as they promise? Yes it damn well can!



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### 88 BORDERLANDS: THE ZOMBIE ISLAND OF DR NED

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## PCZONE Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: [xworksinteractive.com](http://xworksinteractive.com).





# REVIEW SALIENS VS PREDATOR

Alright boys,  
break it up.

## AT A GLANCE...

Perhaps the most gut-wrenchingly violent game we've ever witnessed, a terrifying single player game, and a clever multiplayer experience to boot.

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:**  
3.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista), and a 256MB NVIDIA 7900/ATI X1800 or better.

### HOW IT STACKS

ALIENS VS  
PREDATOR 2 **93%**

ALIENS VS  
PREDATOR (2000) **91%**

ALIENS VS  
PREDATOR **82%**



"Yep, this is your problem  
right here – severed trachea."



# ALIENS VS PREDATOR

It's not a nice thing, having *Steve Hogarty* hug your face

**DEVELOPER** Rebellion  
**PUBLISHER** SEGA  
**WEBSITE** [sega.com/  
games/aliens-vs-predator](http://sega.com/games/aliens-vs-predator)  
**ETA** 19 February  
**PRICE** £29.99

**M**Y FAVOURITE SOUND, probably out of all of them, is the ones made by aliens when they're being horrifically slaughtered in their second film, *Aliens*. It is, I think, based on a heavily distorted recording of a trumpeting elephant, sped up to make it absolutely terrifying in a way only the panicked, high-pitched scream of a flailing pachyderm can be.

In second place it's the dense, tinny shred of a pulse rifle. Then there's the muffled, static veil draped over your ears when the Predator switches to thermal vision, married with his exotic, guttural clucks as he lops his tongue about inside his mandible box-mouth. Sexy.

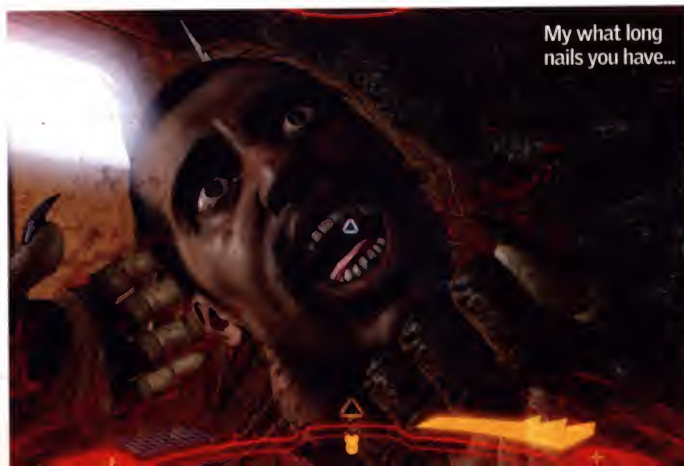
Every *Aliens vs Predator* game has understood the importance of replicating the most aurally recognisable aspects of its characters, and this release continues

that tradition. It sounds incredible. Incredible enough to make me want to say words like "aural soundscape" and "crunchy sonic feast". Here's a game that's mostly about inflicting horrendous injuries on deserving creatures, and it's one in which you'll appreciate every sinewy crunch, gargled howl, bloody slosh and hollow snap.

*Aliens vs Predator* is sickeningly violent – more so in one of the three campaigns than the others, admittedly – in ways that are borderline comical and dancing on the periphery of decency.

## GORE-TASTICAL

Lovely, spine-tearing, eye-socket spearing madness then. Where the films lost credibility the moment they went PG, Rebellion's *AvP* wears its 18 certificate with pride. These are Schwarzenegger's *Predators* and Ripley's *aliens*. Sadly, these





**"This game doesn't flinch in showing you brutality on a level not seen since the early films"**

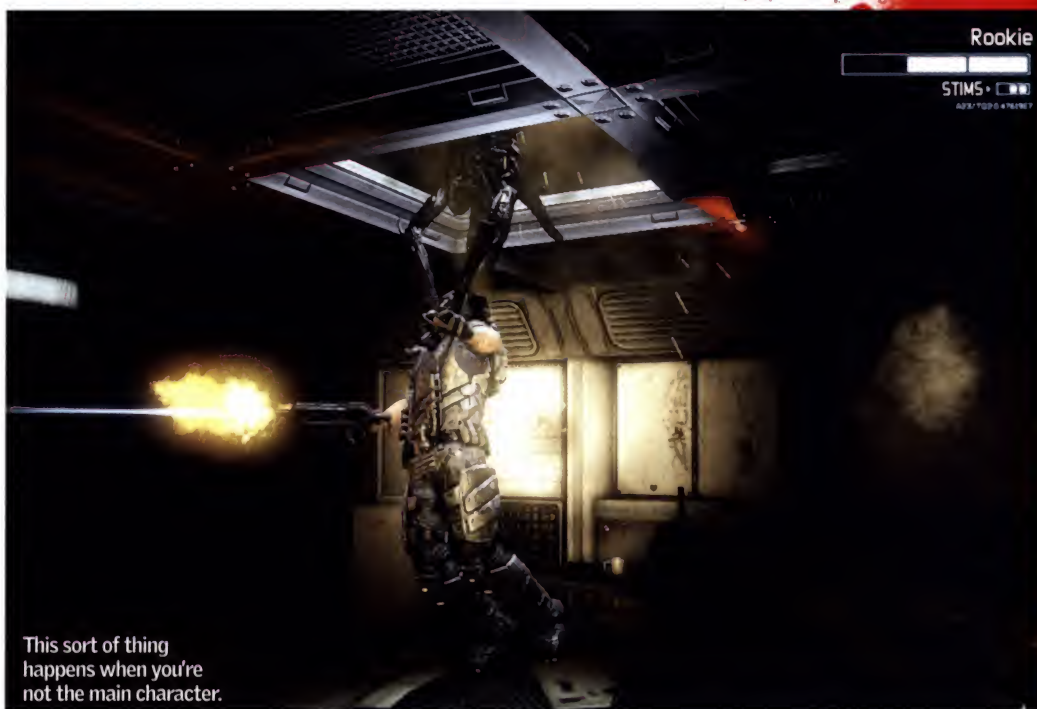
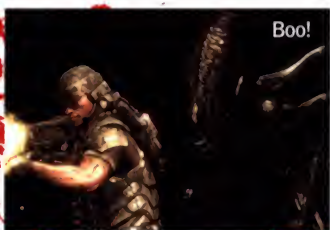
"Now that I've got your full attention..."

are the same one-dimensional barking space marines you've seen a thousand times before, but the point stands – this game doesn't flinch in showing you brutality on a level not seen since the early films. The good ones.

## NO YUTANI

So, evil megacorp Weyland-Yutani have found some ancient ruins on a distant planet, and in their efforts to exploit the artifacts found within they've attracted the attention of the ruin's guardians: the tribal, dreadlock-sporting Predators. (Bit of a pedant's minefield, this review, but we'll stick to calling the angry monsters 'Predators' for the sake of our sanity). The planet also happens to be home to a colony of Giger's xenomorphs, thereby allowing for the classic three-way struggle seen in both of the previous games to erupt all over again.

Three campaigns straddle the same plot arc, giving you three perspectives from which to view the various goings-on, and three markedly different experiences. The Marine draws the short straw, a panicking, fleshy sack of prey permanently seconds from being



scythed in two by a swishing xenomorph tail. It's a campaign of fear, into which Rebellion stir a steady stream of ratcheted tension. The cautionary beeping of your motion tracker is such a recognisable device that it hardly needs explaining, but here you go: the closer a moving object is to you, the higher pitched and more rapid the beep. The thing generates fear.

Registering false positives in nearly every darkened corner, the environment

takes pleasure in suggesting random shadows might contain dripping alien death, and for the first 10 minutes you won't even meet one of the things. You'll be yelping at vents, alarmingly shaped shadows and dangling bits of wire which, in a case of misjudged engineering, look identical to the tails of lackadaisical, ceiling-dwelling aliens.

The Alien campaign, on the other hand, is a reduced affair. Weapons and frippery are replaced by tooth and claw,

and the unique ability to climb on any surface allows you to stalk marines from the darkness like a pervert Spider-man. You're the smarter-than-your-average specimen known as Number Six, receiving curiously detailed orders from your Queen (who's kind enough to mark objectives on your HUD, in between shitting out a thousand eggs) and fighting to save her and your colony from the nefarious human threat.



# NOW AND THEN

Nostalgia is wrong, everything really was shit 10 years ago...

## 2000



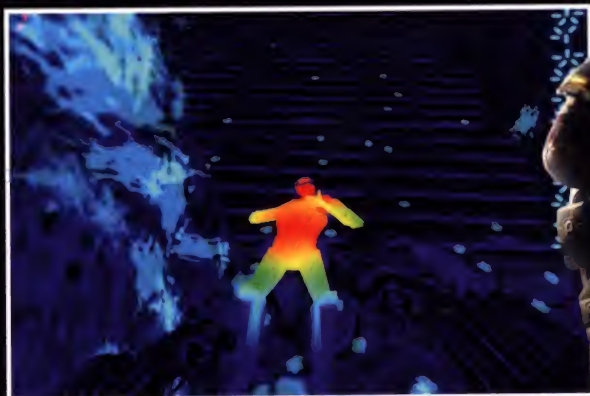
### MARINES (2000)

The original *AvP* opened with you standing in a giant, hollow box, while a man on a tiny TV awkwardly told you that everybody was dead and you were to make your way to an airlock via a room full of sterilised alien eggs. It was rather silly.



### ALIENS (2000)

So excited were Rebellion about their xenomorphs being able to clamber up walls, the first level of the Alien campaign resembled an Escher painting. Felt less like you were an Alien, and more like you were a large, sweating hamster.



### PREDATOR (2000)

You appear from somewhere, for some reason, and chase low-poly humans around. You feel confused, incapable of understanding why you exist, or why your face splits open like a Terry's Chocolate Orange.

## 2010



### MARINES (2010)

Now, you wake up after the team dragging your unconscious body to the infirmary are ambushed by aliens. You've only got a pistol and some flares, and all of the corridors are doing their best to scare you. It is rather scary.



### ALIENS (2010)

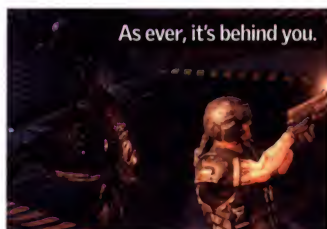
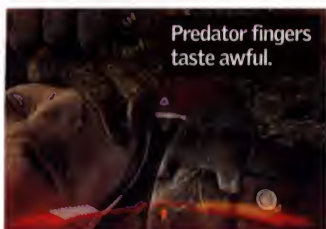
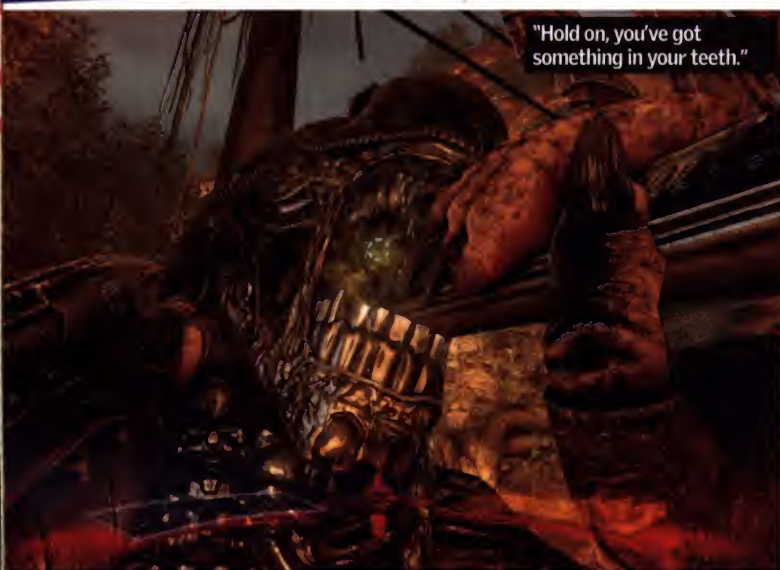
You're the most awesome drone around, farmed by Weyland-Yutani's research division and studied by one Doctor Groves. When you climb on the ceiling, it really feels like you're climbing on a ceiling. Truly magical.



### PREDATOR (2010)

You arrive from space, very annoyed at the humans for dicking about in your temple. Your mates give you a tutorial, before you set off to help out some "Youngbloods". It's like *Saving Private Ryan* crossed with a road trip movie.





Behind door number three is the Predator campaign, a more technical character who boasts thermal optics, camouflage, a plasma cannon, proximity mines, a big spear and a sharpened Frisbee. He can leap great distances: holding down the Shift key projects a cursor on to platforms you're pointing at, and, if it's a valid platform, the spacebar will cause him to jump to that place in a very dramatic fashion. Separating the marines and ambushing them individually is the Predator way.

## DIFF'RENT FOLKS

That's the cast, of which some work better than others. The Marine's campaign has clearly had the most time, care and attention paid to it. It's the longest of the three, features real voice actors, where the others use subtitles and squeaks, and starring a spunky lady marine alongside captain something, who you must save from an alien death.



As encounters with the indigenous population increase, you waver pleasingly between the roles of predator and prey by virtue of occasionally dropping all of your best guns down a hole, leaving you with a pistol, your wits, a dark corridor and an infinite supply of extremely short-lived flares.

Your odds are regularly being shaken up in this way, ensuring that you spend enough time genuinely fearing the blinking dots on your motion tracker, cowering and starting at the flickering shadows cast by your tossed flares, and enough time happily and fearlessly popping their acid-filled phallic heads with grenades and smartguns.

It's worth mentioning just how pretty Giger's skittering sex metaphors are, too. Great greasy things, are the aliens, moving unpredictably along walls and ceilings, at all times beautifully animated and intricately detailed. As absurd as it sounds, their flowing, flicking tails are their most convincing component, snaking behind their skeletal forms as they corner and leap from surface to surface. In the Alien campaign, you'll spend real minutes chasing your physics-powered tail.

Your armoury increases to include a shotgun and a powerful scoped rifle,

# "The campaigns are linear, checkpoint-pocked trots from one area to the next"



around about the same time you begin to encounter acid-spitting aliens and the Freud-baiting facehuggers.

Inevitably, when your objective changes focus and you find yourself pitched against human opponents, the change in pace throws the Alien's combat into sharp relief. Instead of frantically searching walls and ceilings for scuttling enemies, you're seeking out enemies who intelligently find cover. The notion of an enemy who, at this late stage, doesn't simply sprint towards you

in an attempt to stab you from every angle at once feels oddly unnatural but wholly welcome.

Otherwise, you're dragging your lonely self through some scenic environments, locations through which all three campaigns pass. Marines have their cold, metallic, space-age grime. Aliens prefer their homes to resemble the interior of a giant decaying anus: dank, maze-like hives peppered with facehugger-bearing eggs. Predators have their vaguely Mayan tombs, riddled

# "In the Alien campaign, you'll spend real minutes chasing your physics-powered tail"





with switches and temples and at least one ancient combat arena (inside of which every campaign gets to have a boss fight).

No matter who you choose to play as, the campaigns are linear, checkpoint-pocked trots from one area to the next, and one from which every ounce of fat has been trimmed. *AvP*'s campaigns are worryingly short – you could race through the Alien campaign in under two hours, and the Marine's in four – but they're densely packed with well-constructed set pieces, engineered scares and often striking locations. The Predator campaign, in particular, is almost puzzle-like in delivering small

arenas of patrolling humans and tasking you with murdering the lot of them. Your distract ability allows you to target a single marine and lure him to a point using a voice recording, a highly telegraphed (they shout things like "I think the noise came from here!" when they reach the bit of floor you told them to go to) but useful tactic which creates an opportunity to grab and violently dismember the wandering victim.

Aliens grab too. And where Predators jab wristblades into eye sockets, aliens spear chests on barbed tails and plunge their inner-mouths through foreheads to regain health. You'll gag on your



"Right, now how do I series link  
*Mock the Week* on this?"





own nostalgia gland as, when playing as the Alien, you realise you can still slash limbs off corpses and leave them lying about the place for their friends to find. Scooting up and down walls is at first disorientating, but soon becomes second nature – and as long as you're in the dark you can take a moment to relax and figure out if you're upside-down or not, just like a real alien probably does.

Darkness effectively makes you invisible to marines who aren't alerted to your presence, working very much like the Predator's cloaking device. Once they know you're nearby however, they'll poke about with flashlights until they've found your hiding place, requiring you to move and jump between shadows, hissing to lure individuals before tearing their faces off in showers of blood, skin and bone.

## ALL IN

So those are the campaigns. Three discrete experiences, each one adapted to suit the mechanics of its given species, with the Marine's more fully realised than the others. Number Six's journey ends all too abruptly, and does away with the fun larval stages in *AvP2*. It literally (and this isn't a spoiler) winces and dies (maybe) of sadness, three hours before you'd expect.

The Predator's amazing and explosive murder-jaunt, on the other hand, doesn't offer the level of tension you experience as a huddled, terrified Marine. What it offers instead is glorious disgust. Hitting

those fear-notes by draping silhouettes of scary objects in front of you is something Rebellion excel at, and the Predator campaign, while a panacea for the feeling of vulnerability you're left with having finished the Marine section, certainly isn't where *AvP*'s best bits lie.

They lie instead in the game's multiplayer, a collection of game modes lifted from the popular sports of the day: straight deathmatch; a *Left 4 Dead*-style Survival mode in which you and three other marines defend yourselves against waves of xenomorphs; a Domination game mode in which aliens and marines fight to control three points of the map; Infection, in which a team of marines is whittled down by aliens, with each fallen human joining the ranks of the increasingly powerful alien brood; and Predator Hunt, which pitches one player as the Predator, slaughtering other players before passing the mantle on to the one who bests him in battle.

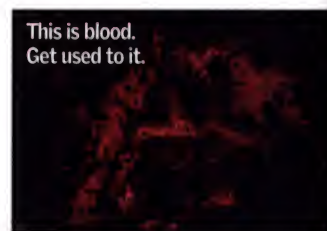
Crucially, they all work within the context of the three characters and their abilities. Survival is the co-op mode you dreamt of after watching *Aliens* – a desperate last stand against an unending tide of flashing claws and teeth. It's a basic, boiled down affair though, featuring nought but players, their guns (with an occasional auto-aiming, xeno-seeking smartgun drop), and an endless supply of angry, angry scuttling enemies.

"I've got something on the end of my wristblades, could you take a quick look?"



Elsewhere, the straightforward three-way deathmatch appears finely balanced. Both aliens and Predators can perform their unblockable trophy kills by moving behind enemies and hammering the E key. Once locked into the gruesome animation, the attacker is then at his most vulnerable, creating the potential for a ridiculous conga line of trophy killers, or for one intelligent player to hold back and toss a few grenades or plasma cannon rounds into the fray. Marines lack the ability to tear bones right out of another player's body, and

This is blood. Get used to it.



instead rely on countering melee attacks, which gives them more than enough time to pile a few shotgun rounds into their stumpled victim.

## THE BEST BIT

The multiplayer modes are fast paced – which makes sense, as more people are being stabbed and speared than shot – but it remains faithful to the fiction. Few concessions are made in porting abilities from the single-player campaign to multiplayer – admirably, you'll be cloaking and leaping from shadows as a Predator, dropping from the ceiling as an alien, and running away from moving objects as a marine.

The constant exchange of what are essentially backstabs doesn't grate either, instead the experience is closer to playing on an instagib server – that is, you'll kill, die and respawn with enough regularity that you'll place little value in your continuing existence, scoffing nervously at death as it buzzes by you over and over again.

*Aliens vs Predator* is a brilliantly authentic and cinematic experience, tinged with a vague sense that more could've been done with the single player to properly spear our eyeballs into attention. It's savage, dark, and ultra violent, just like we said on the cover, but holding it back from a higher score are

# "Survival is the co-op mode you dreamt of after watching *Aliens*"



Maybe, out of all the aliens, this one just wants a hug.





The tiny mouth is the brains of the operation.

Yes it's Lance 'Bishop' Henriksen, and yes he does the voice.

Unarmed humans can be harvested.

These contact lenses can be buggers to take out.



"Why I oughta!"



Aliens are hard to surprise.

Alien and Predator campaigns that end too soon and don't reach a satisfying conclusion. Does it compare well to the rest of the series? Yes, of course it does, at times it tears the throat out of the previous two games and dances on their acid-speckled, increasingly decrepit corpses. But will it make as big an impact? No. It's old-school, a shooter from a decade past, and with that comes all the baggage you'd expect: often startling linearity, irrelevant plot and scenes two steps away from the *Modern Warfare*-style blockbuster set pieces to which we're fast becoming accustomed.

I'd argue that we wouldn't want it any other way when it comes to *Aliens vs Predator*. It's deliriously gory, unwaveringly confident and spectacular fun. And, at the very least, it's far better than the dogshit films. **PCZ**

## PCZONE

**GRAPHICS** Dark. Very dark  
**SOUND** Straight from the movies  
**MULTIPLAYER** 18 players. Lovely

- ✓ Looks and sounds authentic
- ✓ Shocking gore
- ✓ Marine campaign's terrifying
- ✓ Multiplayer will last
- ✗ Single player won't

# 82

Spine-tearingly fantastic





# MASS EFFECT 2

Jon Blyth gets a little more conversation, and a little more action

**DEVELOPER** BioWare  
**PUBLISHER** EA  
**WEBSITE** masseffect.  
 bioware.com  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99

## AT A GLANCE...

An action RPG with improved squad combat, and the best script and acting ever seen in gaming.

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:**  
 1.8GHz Core Duo, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista and Windows 7), GeForce 6800 or Radeon X1600 Pro or better. DRM: disc check only.

## HOW IT STACKS

MASS EFFECT 2 **93%**

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS **93%**

MASS EFFECT **92%**

**S**O, WHERE WERE we? The Council had been obliterated, boy Shepards have embarked on a relationship with Ashley Williams, and you'd picked Udina to head up the new Council, with humanity taking a leading role. Well, that's the default situation, for anyone who's lost their game saves. One of *Mass Effect 2*'s most tromboned aspects is the ability to carry on your story from the original game, as you played it.

Of course, it's not as a complicated or fundamental a feature as BioWare are hoping you'll think. Most of your missions involve your new crew, and most of your conversations don't involve who you chose to head the Council. But it's still impressive – over the course of three

games, each spanning 20-30 hours, you could get bitten on the arse by something you did a solid 72 hours of gameplay ago. That's impressive enough for me to doff a couple of hats. This isn't something I find myself saying often, but I'd love to see BioWare's flowcharts.

Of course, phrases like 'mind blowing' are easy to throw around. As a phrase, it's a stupid cliché, and carries about as much sincere weight as 'eye-popping'

game is going to be different. It may not literally blow minds out of skulls, but it's brilliant anyway.

## SQUARE ONE

The sequel starts with a fully powered-up, post-*ME1* climax Commander Shepard at the helm of his ship, the Normandy. Its familiar interior takes you back into the *Mass Effect* comfort zone immediately, until the appearance of

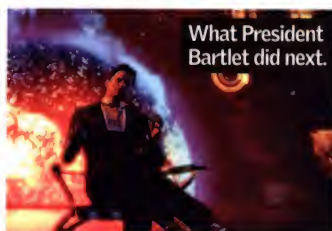
## "Play ME2 like a solo third-person shooter, and you'll fall into a rut"

does for graphics. But imagining the organisation that goes into making an overarching plot that'll eventually span 60-80 hours of dialogue-led storytelling, 'mind blowing' seems fair enough.

Even if you acknowledge that most of the unique-to-you plot elements are irrelevant when you talk to your new crew members, and even when you acknowledge that the conversation trees aren't as vastly branching as you might first imagine, the fact remains, your

a massive laser-shitting spacecraft rips you right back out. The Normandy doesn't stand a chance – blast after blast lands on the ship, shearing off all the important bits, like external walls. As the crew evacuate, Shepard goes back in to rescue Joker, who's having a stubborn moment of dedication to his post.

Shepard reaches him, but another bloody great laser scythes him from the increasingly skeletal Normandy, and sends him cart wheeling into space.



What President Bartlet did next.



## ON THE BOUNDARY OF CONTROVERSY

*Mass Effect* gained a brief moment in the moralist spotlight, when the religious and the right wing condemned the inclusion of hot alien sex.

In *Mass Effect 2* The opening scenes on the Omega spaceport contain a very quick introduction to the sleazy Afterlife nightclub, giving you your first opportunity to sit and watch a blue-skinned stripper, and your larger crew will give you a wider scope for office romance, but there are moments when cut-aways are too abrupt, showing where BioWare chickened out.

On the Urdnot clan's Krogan outpost, for example, there's a moment where you can bet on what amounts to a dog fight. The dogs enter the pit, and suddenly you're receiving your winnings through a HUD icon. It's so badly woven into the game's action that it's obvious BioWare weren't sure where to include the animals' scrap.

Obviously, we don't expect to watch the match – but a brief sound effect and a paragonic Shepard wincing in sympathy would've been nice.

If someone's hands glow, shoot them. Shoot them dead.

"I am your mother Shepard... Not really, just kidding."

Renegade Shepard can turn into a headhunter.

As he flails airlessly towards the nearby planet, your first thought is: "Well, I've read the previews, I know he's not dead. So this is the level one skill-reset event, isn't it?"

It's more than that: it's an intro to the new enemies, the Catchers, and your induction into the mysterious and morally ambiguous Cerberus organisation. Shepard's resurrection process is also a chance for a makeover. If you like, you

can choose a new profession from the game's six career choices. It's the same deal as the first game: three pure styles, (the technical Engineer, the gun-happy Soldier, or the mage-like Adept), and three hybrid classes for those who prefer variety to deep specialism. Not that it matters so much now – the new combat system makes your teammates' skills feel as accessible as your own, so preparing for combat is as much about choosing

a balanced squad as it is developing Shepard's powers.

As you come out of the menu systems and go back to controlling Shepard, it's not because your surgery is complete, it's because there's a state of emergency on the ship. The mechs have been hacked, and you quickly find your first two teammates, Jacob and Miranda. This sets the tone for the combat throughout the game: squads of three, progressing along well-disguised corridors, with cash, mission, upgrade, and story rewards concealed down non-essential routes.

### A BETTER SHOOTER

Control has evolved slightly away from the menus that pause the action while you make up your mind – it's far more possible to play *Mass Effect 2* like an action shooter. But the pause system is an equally viable way to play, and will often be essential, as the type of enemy, and their setup of barriers and armour

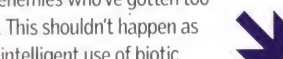
forces you to reallocate your weapon and skills loadouts. It's not the most difficult system, and unless you vary your squad it can become repetitive. If you use all the options open you, it doesn't get a chance to become too noticeable – play *ME2* like a solo third-person shooter, and you'll quickly fall into a dull rut.

The movement is much more dynamic, too. BioWare have surgically incorporated the endemic *Gears of War* automatic cover system into the action, giving you a much easier way to hide, when your barrier's down and the screen's gone red. It's frustrating to think I'm stupid enough that a shaky run-cam still grabs me by the neck and heart, but it's a tried and trusted mind-trick that still works.

The control system only becomes clumsy when you're forced into melee with enemies who've gotten too close. This shouldn't happen as semi-intelligent use of biotic



Fishboy and the Illustrated Girl.





My kingdom for a spanner!



skills and the pause menu should keep everyone at bay (unless you're playing on the daft difficulty settings).

## CIGARETTE?

Soon, you're introduced to the Illusive Man, a suspect gentleman (shown by his habit of smoking – in America this makes him an automatic villain) who occupies an unspecified other-space in which you appear as a hologram.

This chap gives you a new, improved Normandy, with a charming AI called EDI (who develops an unexpected sense of humour in times of extreme tragedy), and a quantum-entangled link to his nowhere room. With a list of new comrades to hunt out and recruit, this is where your new adventure begins, as

loyalty, and – in a gameplay payoff that reminds you this is not just a fantastic and epic interactive movie – unlock a fourth power.

Mentioning the phrase "interactive movie", I've so far ignored what *Mass Effect* is: gaming's most engaging, incredible and unexpectedly enjoyable conversation simulator. In any other game, this would be a tragic chore. In any other game, unskippable dialogue would be a sign of precious scriptwriting, and a reason for docking the score. But this isn't a baffling Hideo Kojima wank attack, or a badly-acted European RPG – it's a collection of subtly scripted and perfectly performed character led stories that are shot through with an epic storyline. It's timed so well (you choose

## "This is not just a fantastic and epic interactive movie"

a rebooted, reset, reconfigured and slightly disfigured Shepard.

Your journey will boost your crew's numbers to a potential 10, and as you progress, every member of your crew will offer you a mission that'll tell their own personal story in more detail, earn their

your response while the other person is still talking, so conversations are uncommonly fluid), and it bores so rarely that *ME2* lifts the benchmark for game writing set by the original.

Of course, this means that impatient caffeine-fuelled tools will hate *ME2*.



Had her.

Many games are designed for two types of gamer: the skeletal core of the story is presented to everyone, with audio logs and fragments of story littered around for those willing to explore. Other games tell a simple story by working it into the background (*Left 4 Dead* and *Portal*) – but *ME2* is a game where nearly all information is given by dialogue.

You can take the most direct route through any conversation by choosing the right option – but you'll be punished by only seeing a fraction of what BioWare's huge universe has to offer. If you're a compulsive chat-skipper, think hard before you play this game. You'll

miss out on the game's opportunities for romance, and fail to identify and complete the secret missions the universe has to offer. You don't get XP for killing creatures, you get it for completing missions, so you'll end up miles away from the level 30 cap. But most frustrating of all, you'll end up with heroic or savage shortcuts through certain scenarios denied to you.

This is the return of the Paragon and Renegade system, that decided which set of endings were open to you. This system lets you intervene in some cutscenes. An early Paragon example lets you prevent a young hothead from signing up to a

## THE GOOD SHEPARD

Being nice has its rewards



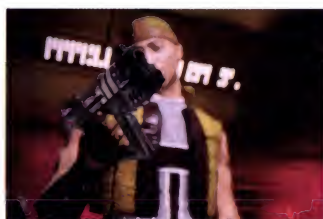
### CHOOSE THE TOP OPTION

If the summaries seem ambiguous, the top half of the conversation wheel generally has Paragon options. Going straight ahead is the best way to just get it over with.



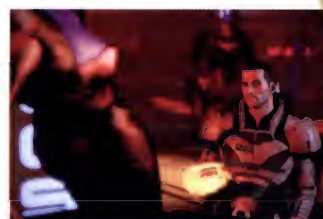
### CHOOSE THE BLUE OPTION

Blue options are unlocked by consistently choosing Paragon options in conversations: they're moments of wisdom and loveliness that dicks just can't pull off.



### STAGE INTERVENTIONS

Interrupt cutscenes when the Paragon icon appears, and you'll change the course of the cutscene, a bit like *Dragon's Lair*. This young man will send me a thank you email later.

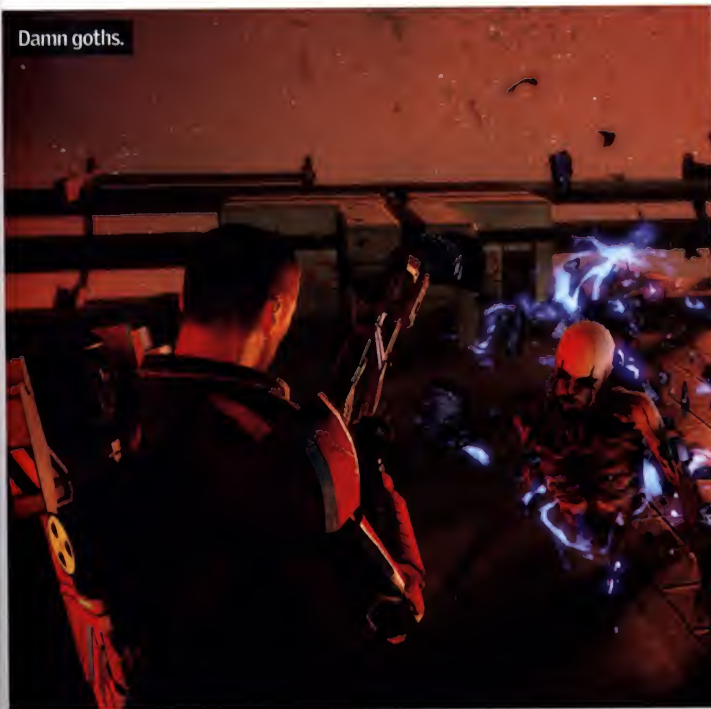


### TIP GENEROUSLY

If, in *Mass Effect 3*, this woman goes on to be the queen of something or other, she might remember the time you stared at her chongs and gave her a few credits.



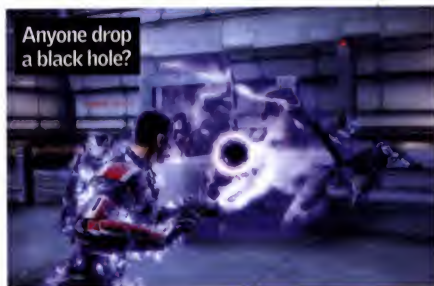
Damn goths.



Things don't look good for Tali.



Anyone drop a black hole?



Police never change.



doomed mercenary mission. A Renegade intervention later on lets you interrupt an interrogation by pushing the interrogatee off a building. It's difficult to say whether these options are open to you depending on your prior decisions without playing the game 15 times whilst scientifically varying my responses to each dialogue option, but I played through as a Paragon, and many Renegade options were open to me, so I can only assume they're always open to you.

## "Continues the tradition of brilliant brink-of-cliché space opera"

One doesn't come at the expense of the other – behaving heroically doesn't deduct Renegade points, and punching people off a ledge doesn't lower your Paragon points. But it takes dedication to one attitude to guarantee that you've progressed far enough down one option to use all the benefits of your branch.

This system, as simple as it is, is a real incentive to play to your role consistently, and BioWare are always sophisticated enough to keep the moral choices frequently ambiguous, and the tone of both branches consistent enough that you don't seem schizophrenic.

At certain points, in some crucial situations, a blue Paragon option will have Shepard say something wise and convincing, and a red option will get you out of the situation with some threats: these require a certain amount of points, and if you don't qualify you'll be forced into a less desirable outcome.

Despite the console focus, this PC version is a highly competent conversion. Mining planets – one of the duller aspects of the console game – is sped hugely by the use of a mouse, making resource collection for upgrades far less reliant on OCD.

So, that's pretty much it: it's the same game with more dynamic combat, better squad control, and a fun way to interrupt conversations. But the game isn't perfect.

There are some odd aspects – like BioWare forgetting that people double-click to select items, or that mouse-over is an event that people have used since the tooltip. So selecting a squad and upgrading yourself is a matter of clicking all over the place. And while the radial menu of the console version has wisely disappeared, its replacement is a bit fussy at higher resolutions.

### SHORTFALLS

The hacking games are as irritating and repetitive as any hacking mini-game, the streamlined upgrades system feels a little too smoothed-out with the notched system of *Mass Effect* replaced by an over-simple 1-2-3-4 ranking system. Upgrades to weapons, too – five upgrades, each offering an extra 10% damage seems to be the general shape of things – feel uninspired. While I'm being a fussy prick, I'd say that the upgrades system is badly organised, especially for such an experienced RPG developer.

But this is mainly cosmetic stuff. *Mass Effect 2* continues the great tradition of brilliant brink-of-cliché space opera, with Shepard as the lovey-dovey cuddleprince or the alpha male prick. It's a story that you're probably already hugely invested in, and if you're not, you

really should go back and play the original. If not to fill yourself in on the Council, Reapers, and Sovereign, or to carve your own niche into the events of *Mass Effect 2*, then because the improvements to combat will make it difficult to go back. Faults dutifully noted and easily forgiven, this game is truly epic storytelling. **PCZ**

## PCZONE

**GRAPHICS** Subtle facial animation, smoother combat  
**SOUND** Space ambience and excellent acting  
**MULTIPLAYER** Solo play

- ✓ Immersive, engaging storyline
- ✓ Better than Hollywood acting
- ✓ Improved cover
- ✓ Squad options have evolved
- ✗ Weapons and armour upgrades badly organised
- ✗ Hacking mini-games

# 93

Major league excellence

Part toad, part snapping turtle, and very deadly.





# BIOSHOCK 2

**Will Porter drills holes in people to deny his real name is Shirley Crabtree**

DEVELOPER 2K Marin  
PUBLISHER 2K Games  
WEBSITE bioshock2game.com  
ETA Out now  
PRICE £39.99

## AT A GLANCE...

Ryan's dystopia has gone all leftie, a custody battle for a gifted child is raging between her guardians, and you've got a bloody big drill for a hand. Would you kindly return to Rapture and sort it all out?

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:**  
3.0GHz processor, 2GB RAM and a 256MB graphics card. Internet connection required on install. DRM: SecureROM and limited installs via Games for Windows LIVE!

### HOW IT STACKS

BIOSHOCK 96%

SYSTEM SHOCK 2 95%

BIOSHOCK 2 92%

**I**HAD ZERO anticipation for *BioShock 2*. I'd already been to Rapture. I'd taken the trip in the bathysphere, I'd seen the fish, I'd stabbed the same battered vein full of exotic stimulants repeatedly and I'd beaten a man to death with his own golf club. Job done: as far as failed underwater civilizations went, the box was ticked.

Inevitably though (not heeding my rants of "Why didn't they put it in space or something?") it turns out that *BioShock 2* is pretty bloody wonderful. In fact it's a better game than the original. Much as the following reads like the exclamation mark strewn reverse of the annual *FIFA* review, it's no lie: the structure is better, the combat is better, the plasmids are better, the storytelling is better and the emotion is realer.

Then again, in my eyes *BioShock* wasn't exactly the perfect game: gunplay was shonky, and post-Ryan reveal it pretty much gave up. It just had those massive gameplay balls in narrative, script and art-style though didn't it? It would sometimes stand there pissing on our legs, while we, the gamers, could just gaze up at the aforementioned giant

balls and convince ourselves that it was raining.

*BioShock 2* patches up those leaks, while simultaneously providing more than enough gobsmackery to let it perch proudly on its own two shiny brass legs and drill naysayers in the face.

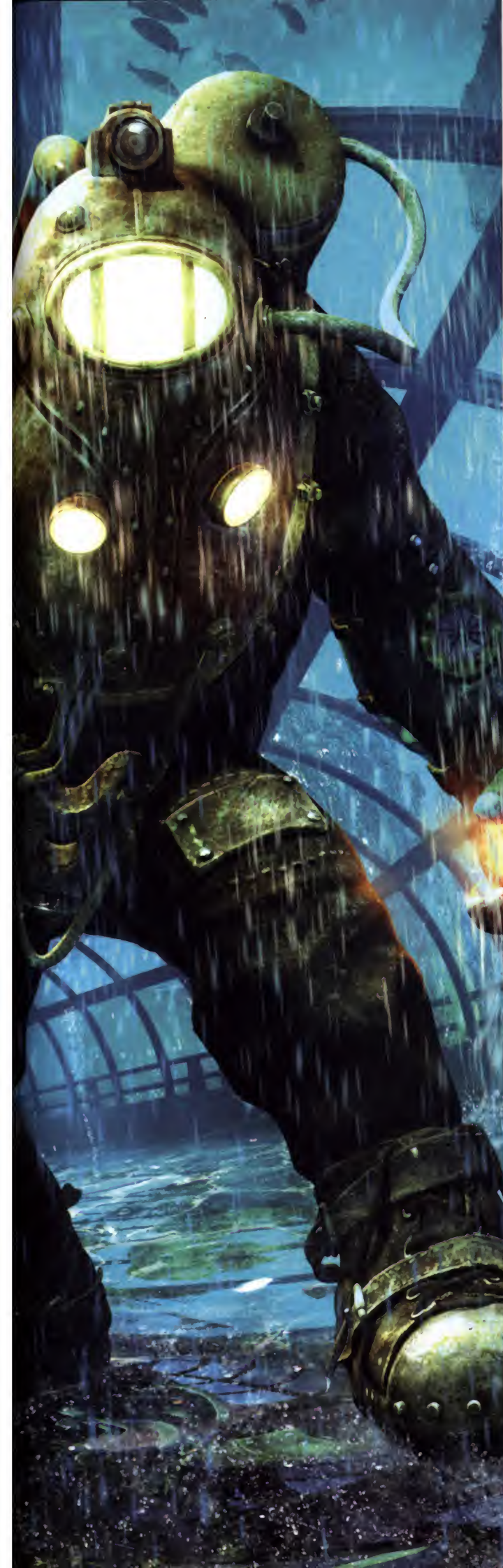
## HIPPY CHICK

Ten years have passed since a faux-Irishman did you-know-what to you-know-who, and in the power vacuum since Ryan's departure a new leader has emerged bearing a different selection of aspirational leaflets. The queen-bitch currently in vogue is Sophia Lamb – a psychotherapist turned commune dictator, armed with a mean pair of specs and a well-thumbed copy of *The Dummy's Guide to Collectivism*. You, meanwhile, play an inconveniently reactivated Big Daddy (one of the first) whose quest to be reunited with the Little Sister he was previously bound to gets him right up Lamb's rigid hippy nose.

As for your wanderings, well rather than take to the underwater skies in inter-level Bathyspheres, this time you're exploring the structures on the seabed –

"I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain..."





Rapture wouldn't be the same without creepy little girls.



Cult alert.

sometimes trotting around the sand itself, but more often striding through a sequence of hubs linked by an crumbling undersea train line.

Each hub has problems that need sorting, small children that need saving (or harvesting) and an indigenous population of former rocket scientists

as an excellent melee weapon to fall back on, or indeed specialise in, but requires fuel to run. At first you regard it as a dalliance, but when you're low on ammunition it quickly becomes a hugely satisfying "have it you bastard!" boss-killer – especially once you unlock the ability to charge at unsuspecting Splicers through liberal use of the Shift key.

## "Big Daddies are still something of a challenge to take down"

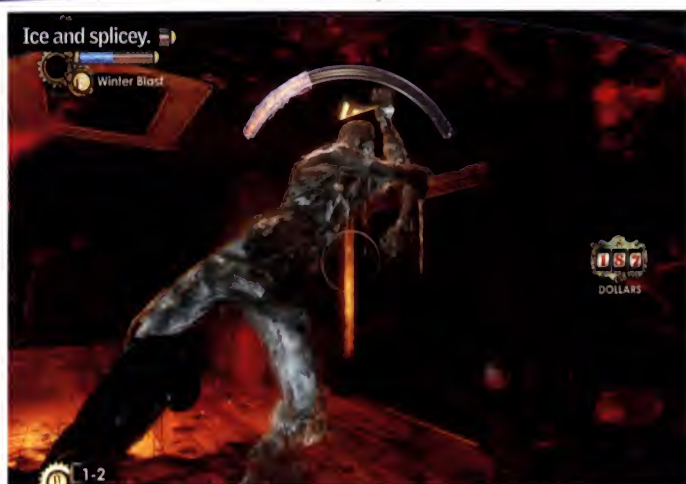
that want to rip you open and suck out your Adam through a straw: in that sense, at least, it's business as usual.

The change from playing as a plucky human to a lumbering Big Daddy isn't as huge a one, in terms of gameplay, as you may have feared – mainly because you don't lumber. You may move around a smidgen slower, but your new metal confines are mainly underlined through an (optional) visor on your HUD, thunderous footsteps and the fact that you have a drill instead of a right hand. Said drill acts

As a Big Daddy you also clearly have a subtly different relationship with the Little Sisters – the pre-pubescent purveyors of the upgrade body goo known as Adam. As in the original, to get at these young ladies (stocks of whom have been replenished by Lamb through kidnapping children from all around the world) you must first kill their metal-cased protectors. The Big Daddies are still something of a challenge to take down – and now come in a new variety – the colander-faced Rumbler – who specialises in lobbing mini-turrets at you and following up with heat-seeking rockets. Once







## SPLICERS A PLENTY

At the time of going to press we hadn't had a chance to play the PC version of *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer. Yet as we have borne witness to it on the 360, we can at least describe it. The multiplayer, set in Rapture's civil war between Ryan's fascists and Atlas' parasites, features deathmatch, team deathmatch and CTF (well, CTLittleSister) bouts in familiar places like Hephaestus and Fort Frolic. To start, each of the eight playable avatars, from bored housewives to irascible businessmen, have their own backstory and voice diaries handle the BioShockian narrative duties. On top of this, Adam you earn in battles can also be spent on upgrading your character towards whatever plasmid fashion is floats your boat. Find the randomly spawning Big Daddy suit during the affray, and you'll find the Adam rolling in a bit quicker too...

they've been dismantled, you have the choice to either harvest or adopt their Little Sister – of which you should always choose the latter, else you'll be missing out on both Adam and the most enjoyable parts of the game.

As you carry your charge around (unseen, up on your back) you'll occasionally hear her pipe up "Look Daddy! Adam!" as you pass dead bodies that have been strategically placed through each level. As you'll quickly learn, each one is essentially a siege mechanic in waiting: you just know that as soon as you set your little trooper down and wait for her to do her business, there'll be a horde of morally questionable obsessives with hooks for hands wanting to steal her. It's the *Daily Mail*'s worst nightmare come true. As such, in the calm before the storm, you set up defences.

**"It's the *Daily Mail*'s worst nightmare come true"**

Every body harvest generally takes place close to doorways through which newly-spawned Splicers will no doubt sprint – and as such you set to criss-crossing them with a grid of handy laser beam traps from the new Rivet gun; familiar electrified trap bolts, that now live in the Spear Gun (itself essentially *Painkiller*'s Stakegun); or throw down the automated turrets that live in the wonderful remote hack tool. What could



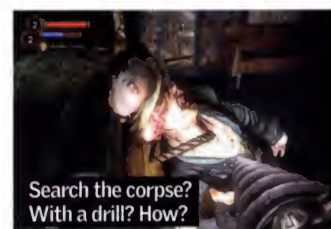
have been some bullshit NPC protection routine instead becomes tower defence gameplay mating with the FPS in furious abandon: best laid plans gradually turn to fiery chaos, and you can't help but cackle as you rev your drill engine amidst the fray.

## HERE'S DADDY!

The game's very best moments take place when all hell is breaking loose, only for a wandering Big Daddy to stroll into the scene – who can then be encouraged to join in the fun through liberal use of the Enrage plasmid.

In fact, in terms of combat, it's this collision of Rapture's organic wandering monster eco-system with the scripted spawns your gameplay sets off that you'll be boring your friends about for weeks. From time to time the action feels so dynamic, and so frenetic, that it's easy to convince yourself that you're part of a battle that you alone will experience.

After a successful collection you can either free the child and deposit her at one of the silver tubes that act as L'il Sister transport devices, or for an extra dose of the good stuff: kill her. Along with other moral choices you're presented with through the game, these decisions will then impinge on what happens in the final levels in rather neat, granular ways. For the time being though, with the Adam you can buy and upgrade your plasmid powers, and indeed tinker with ambient boosts from a wide selection of gene tonics that allow you to specialise your powers in a far more direct fashion than before.





## LOCATION, LOCATION, SUBMARINE

Just some of the places you'll murder people in curious new ways...



### JOURNEY TO THE SURFACE

In Ryan Amusements you'll come across a fairground ride designed to educate kiddiewinks against the dangers of returning to the surface – where mannequins are threatened by a the large red fist of 'the man' stealing tax money and dragging children off to war.



### DIONYSUS PARK

Formerly one of Rapture's artiest districts Dionysus Park has bars, art galleries and cinemas surrounding a central hub, holding a forlorn and rotting merry-go-round. The picture house provides the best place for an Adam-gathering scrap against splicers



### SIREN ALLEY

Rapture's residents had heads for business and bodies for sin – especially when cash was low and they needed Adam. Siren Alley is where many turned to prostitution. And where Splicers still act out some pretty horrific acts on each other. Not a pleasant place.



### TEMPLE OF THE LAMB

Mad holy man Father Wales has a decaying congregation, but that hasn't dampened his devotion to the cult of Lamb's familial society. Things are soon to get spectacularly damp, so be sure to check out the holy relics he has decorating the place. Just sayin'.

Must've been one hell of a party.

The big change is the fact that you now dual-wield plasmid power and firepower – so that old ball-ache of having to flip between hand-o'-fire and hand cannon while being chased by an enraged Victorian Swimsuit is long gone.

What's more, by always having a plasmid power present on-screen the

opportunities for their tactical use pretty much explodes in number – and you'll find yourself organically creating no end of fun personal tactics. My favourite? Why since you ask: it's placing a Cyclone Trap underneath a Splicer and watching them being hurled up into the air, impaling them with the Spear Gun, then

watching them fly though the air and dangle from the top of a nearby wall from the stake that's been wedged through their cranium. Using a Rocket Spear on a Big Daddy frozen in an ice block will also provide a giggle or two.

### SPLICER DICERS

Unlike the cast of new, or differently buffed, items in the weapon slots (Drill, Rivet Gun, Speargun, Gatling Gun, hugely powerful shotgun, remote Hack device, and camcorderised research device) the plasmids are pretty familiar. Electro Bolts, Winter Blasts, Incinerate, Telekinesis and their cohorts all return – alongside more targeted Enrage systems and the ability to paint Splicers with a colour that makes them a high-value target for nearby security systems. Scout, meanwhile, lets you check out areas up ahead with a psychic ghost of sorts – but doesn't involve flaying people alive so is therefore for wussies.

What with everything being more customisable round



An intensive care kit would be of more use.



❖ Rapture these days, when you advance each power up the three-step tech tree (tech shrub, really) they open up more combat options and, excitingly, start to mingle. Place one of my dearly beloved Cyclone traps, for example, and you can top up its capabilities with a chaser of fire, ice or insects to deal more damage to approaching badness.

## DA-DAH-DAH DADDY

Fully upgrade one of the projectile plasmids on their own, and you'll be running around with an EVE-slurping flamethrower, if fire is your thing, trumpeting from your mitt.

The only issue with your various load-outs is one from the original: because you're running around hoovering jam tarts, whiskey and bullets out of every cabinet, dustbin and kitchen sink you come across it's very hard to keep track of exactly what sort of ammo you're flush with. Something complicated by the fact that, again, each gun has three different varieties of pain fuel. Variety it may well be, but it doesn't half involve a lot of furious back-peddalling through art deco arches trying to find something to shoot with.

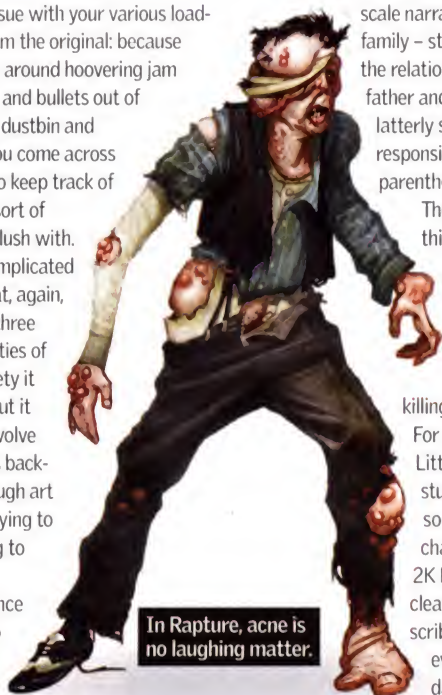
The insistence of the game to list its weapons/

tools through the number keys in the order you find them, meanwhile, mixes up both the bullet-ripping and the non-hurtful – so those like me whose finger-jerk reaction runs along the lines of "3 is for shotgun!" inevitably end up filling the face of a charging Big Daddy with valuable auto hack devices. Something easily remedied with keymap fiddle yes, but a pain nonetheless.

Essentially then, this time combat is less of a side salad to complement remarkable exploratory gameplay and storytelling. This isn't to say that *BioShock 2* skimps on story though. I won't spoil an iota of it but the large-

scale narrative is about family – starting off with the relationship between father and daughter, and latterly showing up the responsibilities of parenthood.

The ways in which this is worked into a game heavy on sucking bile out of corpses and insane whore-killing is wonderful. For a start, the Little Sisters say stuff that really sounds like kiddie-chat – someone at 2K Marin has clearly been scribbling down everything their daughter has



In Rapture, acne is no laughing matter.



Police said he died in "suspicious circumstances."

ever burred. From how they proudly shout "I've finished!" when they've gurgled down some bodily matter all the way to their happy smile when you pick them up – you can't help feel a bond.

Over the top of this is the theme of the wider family: the philosophical collaborative community that Lamb is creating – fed by a common religion (the genesis of which will prove brilliantly familiar). It's all a far cry from the self-reliance that powered Ryan's Rapture and easier to comprehend to boot.

## DADDY DAY CARE

*BioShock 2* isn't all Daddy-daughter day either, and the self-contained stories within each hub are universally excellent. While there are far fewer areas to

explore than the original game (seven in all, with two smaller areas at start and end) they're larger and more varied in theme, never dropping the fun baton or failing to fulfil their individual purpose in drip-feeding the plot to you. The stand-out area, almost matching the original's Fort Frolic, is Fontaine Futuristics – where the slug-sucking and Daddy-splicing first began. Here a calm and collected recorded voice recording gives you solemn instructions that you should kill him once he's been rendered insane, while his contemporary insane self torments you from a flying screen somewhat reminiscent of Evil Edna the TV set in *Willo The Wisp*. Far from the factory-crawl you worry it might be, you soon become an advertising tool in a

## KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

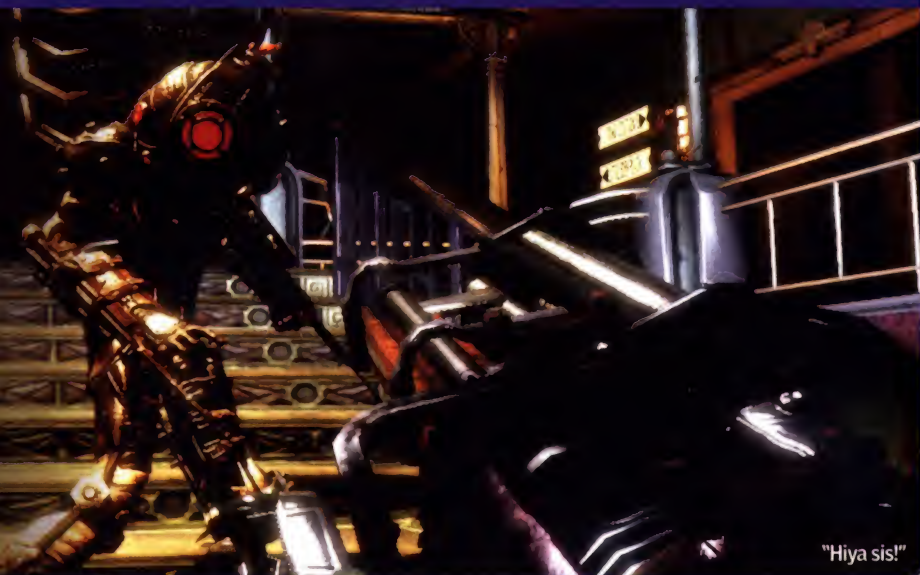
Big Sister proves as competent at beating you up as any off-screen counterparts

As balletic as she is ballistic, the Big Sisters are remarkable creations – beautiful to watch, and terrifying to fight. At first you'll see her in scripted encounters and marvel at the way she leans into corners, and the nimble animation in her leaps and somersaults. When you're in combat you'll be bloody terrified.

As a rule she appears once in every hub after you've fulfilled a specific Adam-based duty (I'm being vague to up the terror when you find out exactly what). After this the music goes plinky plonky, her screams shake your vision and the screen keeps on bleaching white. All the while you're desperately turning from one doorway to the next, trying to determine exactly where she'll appear from.

Like Batman appearing behind Commissioner Gordon, at one point you'll turn and she'll just be standing there. What's more, she'll be striking a pose: that brief second feels like Bruce Forsyth appearing as a silhouette with his knuckles to his forehead to drive the Royal Variety Performance audience wild.

The time for Bruce comparisons, however, is limited. Yelping and frantic evasion swiftly follows: she's utterly terrific. And if you don't get to play a Big Sister in a future *BioShock* game, then I'll be a monkey's Big Uncle.

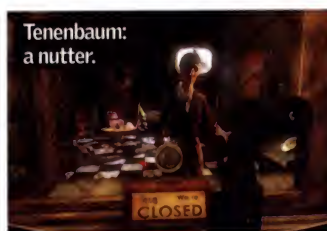
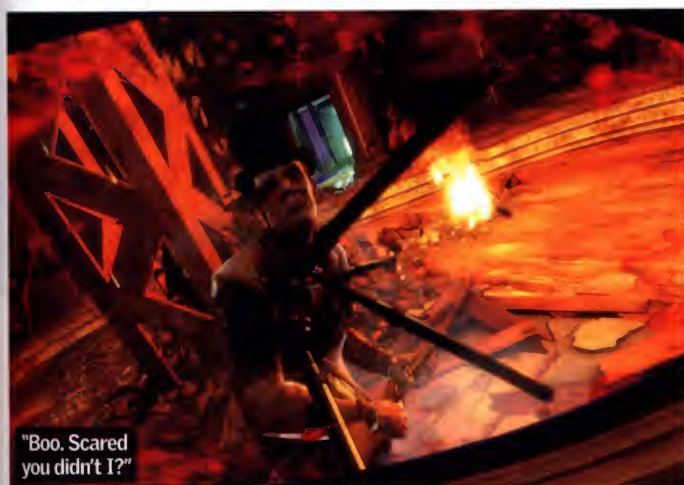


"Hiya sis!"





You just made him mad. Run.



show meant to sell these wondrous new plasmids and... well I won't spoil it.

Elsewhere cinema auditoriums, art galleries, brothels, orphanages, pawn shops, amusement parks, churches and shopping arcades all prove excellent stomping grounds – complete with nutty characters you may or may not get to drill until dead: mad priests, shifty journalist shysters and matriarchal Tom and Jerry housekeeper-types. All impeccably voiced, most bonkers.

The smaller building blocks of storytelling meanwhile that made Rapture such an interesting place last time is still as powerful: the posters, graffiti, suggestive furniture and body-

placement remain just as joyfully chin-scratching and mind-boggling.

A great example comes early in the game: an upturned tram at the foot of a huge staircase in a transport hub. It's a simple reference to the runaway tram scene in *The Untouchables* or, more aptly, the famous Communist propaganda film *Battleship Potemkin*. The thing is, in this version the tram contains a dead dog. This dead dog underlines the insanity of the people of Rapture, and the themes of parenthood and collectivism are writ large on the canvas. Gaming just grew up, got a bit more poncey.

The game's longest stride in narrative is a really clever sequence towards the

end of the game that I simply can't tell you about, but will obliquely reference by saying that it's like the opening FMV to *Syndicate Wars*. You'll know it when you play it. It is worth mentioning that the story is conventional – there's no show-stopping twist. Much as that may sound spoilerish, you'll enjoy the game more if you're not sitting there and building yourself up for a WTF that'll never come.

## DADDY'S DAY

Perhaps aided by this, there are some who'll tell you that *BioShock 2* is a more polished, yet inferior version of the original. And if your memory only goes back to the first few hours of the game and you're incapable of remembering the escort missions and post-twist mediocrity then who knows – you may well agree.

To my mind this is a better, tighter and more emotionally engaging game – but it can't top that first descent below the sea, the first face off against a Big Daddy or the way you gradually came to terms with the ways the Rapture ecosystem worked. In fact, the best way to describe *BioShock 2* is simply to call it what it is: a really good sequel. A sequel

that's brave enough to take an already familiar setting and find a clever way of telling a story that nevertheless feels new, and doesn't listen to the cretins baying stuff like "Put it in Space! Put it in Space!".

Although putting the next one in space would be brill. **PCZ**

## PCZONE

**GRAPHICS** Beautiful and grisly  
**SOUND** No more singing vending machines  
**MULTIPLAYER** It's there

- ✓ *BioShock* refined
- ✓ Brilliant moments
- ✓ Excellently told story
- ✓ Big drill
- ✓ Better than the original
- ✗ Can't match the original

# 92

Daddy Cool

**"To my mind this is a better, tighter and more emotionally engaging game"**





# STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT

David Brown returns to the irradiated wastes...

**DEVELOPER** GSC Game World  
**PUBLISHER** bitComposer Games  
**WEBSITE** [cop.stalker-game.com](http://cop.stalker-game.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

## AT A GLANCE...

Wander around post-apocalypse Ukraine collecting artifacts and killing people. If you liked *STALKER* you'll like *COP*, as it's pretty much the same game all over again.

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:**  
 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM,  
 128MB graphics card.

## HOW IT STACKS

STALKER: CLEAR SKY	88%
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	85%
STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT	80%

**L**IKE THE FIRST two games, *STALKER: Call of Pripjat* is a game of contradictions. At times it's glorious and exciting, a further refinement of the now age-old *STALKER* template. Yet, as ever, most of the idiosyncrasies that define the series are still present and correct, making this pretty much the same game you've played twice before.

It's certainly better, and something that I don't hesitate to recommend to those partial to a bit of radiation-soaked action, but it's still the same. Before its release, noises have been made about *COP* being a substantial step forward, but it isn't. It leaves you thinking, "It's great, but it should have been better."

Let's not get ahead of ourselves though. A little house-keeping needs to be done first. For those that are unfamiliar with all things *STALKER*, it's basically a game where you wander around the irradiated wilds of the Chernobyl area, killing mutants, scavenging for weapons and hunting down twisted bits of radioactive junk that bestow mystical powers on the user.

These artifacts have always been the reason you've been in the Zone, as the area is known to the locals. Naturally, you get dragged into an overriding plot that gives you something else to focus on, but basically artifacts are why you're there.

## MORE OF THE SAME

Except now in *COP*, you're not. You've just got to behave as if you are. You see, while in the first two games you played a *Stalker*, this time you're a Major in the armed forces. You've been sent in to discover why an important mission involving helicopters and scores of army personnel has gone kaputski. The only way to do this is to pretend to be a *Stalker* and generally get up to the same old tricks as before.

*COP* is definitely more story-focused than the previous games, as well as having a far more streamlined, set-piece missions. So more thought has been put into what you get to do in the Zone beyond the basic fetch quest paradigm.

For example, you might have to infiltrate some huge anomalies and place scanners or perhaps do a bit of detective

work to uncover why certain Stalkers are missing. Also, these quests will be long-lasting in their implications. Take the scanner mission: in previous *Stalker* games, finishing it would have meant a reward and that's it, over with. This time, completing it means your map is updated every time an artifact is detected. As for the detective quest, Stalkers in the area will be generally better disposed towards you and free medical supplies will be placed in a stash box for you periodically. Vendors will drop their prices and so on.

In fact, people are perhaps too friendly, certainly in comparison to the previous *STALKER* games. This is perhaps the first thing to worry about if you're a *STALKER* veteran – it's actually pretty easy on the standard difficulty.

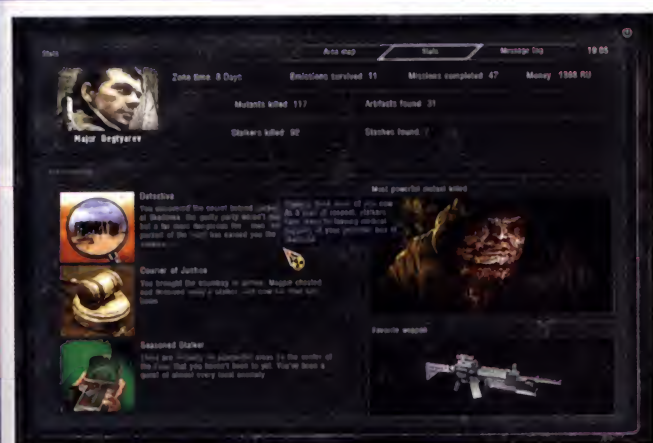




Smoking? What a scoundrel.

## EARN YOUR STRIPES

This time achievements are worth a damn



In-game achievements make an appearance in *Call of Prip'yat*, a first for the series. And, interestingly, they genuinely make a difference, rather than being cosmetic things to bolster your flimsy ego. Visit loads of anomalies and you'll earn the Seasoned Stalker achievement, meaning rarer finds will be yours as you continue to search. Likewise, complete some of the more extensive side missions and Stalkers will reward you with discounts or constant supplies of free stuff.

Play your cards right and you won't actually ever really be doing much fighting, other than with packs of dogs or boars and perhaps the occasional easy-to-kill zombies. The Zone is a less-than-intimidating place to be, more often than not, and this is quite a sad thing to have to report. For long periods I forgot the quick load key was even necessary, so long was it between challenging sections.

This is ideal for new players, but experienced Stalkers will want to avoid the default difficulty and ramp things up right from the get-go.

### YO, STALKER!

It's still idiosyncratically *STALKER* though, as I mentioned earlier. Lots of the little quirks reappear to remind us of where this newer, sleeker version comes from. On one of the machines we tested the game on, performance levels were wildly varied, seemingly dependant on whether you'd loaded up a saved game

while playing or not. The introduction's voiceover kept referring to a timeline that was out of sync with what was being displayed in text form. Characters greet you (and you reply back) in a bizarre mash-up of various American styles. In the same conversation, for example, you might be greeted by a "Wassup bro?" and end it with a "Fuhgeddaboudit". All of this takes place within the same ghastly text-based conversation mechanic as before, which yet again fails to captivate the reader in any way whatsoever.

As I say, *COP* is all about the contradictions, the improvements mixed in with the oddities. Nowhere is this more apparent than with the visuals. Once, grim was the oft-used adjective when it came to *STALKER*. Now, it should be beautifully grim. At times, the visuals are stunning, even on the medium settings, especially when it gets dark and the lightning starts to



**"Noises have been made about *COP* being a substantial step forward, but it isn't"**



He's not as vicious as he looks. He's far more vicious than he looks.

"Yo, wazzup, homes?"

## SUBLIME TO SUBSTANDARD

*Call of Prip'yat's* visuals in a nutshell



When things go right, they really do take the breath away. Don't go reaching for the asthma medication, though, I mean that metaphorically. When lighting is involved, *Call of Prip'yat* looks gorgeous, trees casting huge shadows and the scenery being something you can lose yourself in.

Then you step into a building and the illusion is shattered. It's because lighting is either at a minimum or far less effort has been made to jazz things up. Yes, this is a post-apocalyptic world with crappy, wrecked buildings, but still, the jarring effect of going from one extreme to the other epitomises the game and the extreme positive/negative dysfunction.



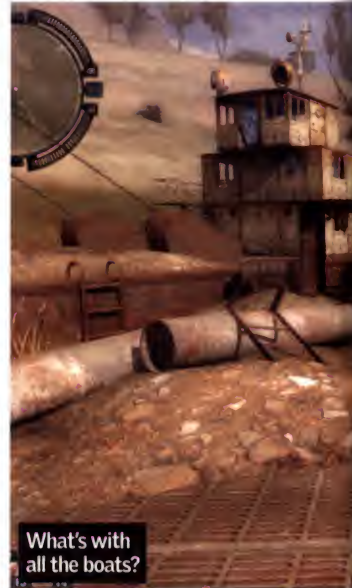
strike. When it turns on the style, *COP* is a superbly realised and atmospheric game. Yet it can look equally ugly, especially indoors. Again with the duality.

Perhaps the main question is whether things have really moved on enough from *Clear Sky* or even the original. It's easy to forget what the original game actually looks and feels like after so many different mod packs and overhauls, as *Oblivion Lost*, *Stalker Complete* and so on have all distorted our view.

### A NEW COAT

So it seems that all the developers have done is implement a lot of the ideas introduced by modders, then slapped a price tag on it. In fact, that's rather unfair. It's surely better for a developer to appropriate good ideas and work them into their next game, making the experience better for everyone. This is pretty much what they've done here, with some touches of their own for good measure. So let's talk tweaking.

If we're accepting that *COP* is basically just a fancier suit on the same old bones, it's important to realise that a lot of the embellishments do make the experience a more pleasant one, on the whole. Although, naturally, one man's



pleasant experience could be boring for another (like with the difficulty). So, just going by my own personal preferences here, I liked the fact it was easier to make money in *COP* than in the others. It seems to be more straightforward to find artifacts, with good scanners becoming available relatively quickly.

Perhaps it is a bit silly that I was able to blow 60,000 on an exoskeleton after a relatively low number of hours invested in the game, but still, it was nice to be able to feel I could earn that money back quickly, rather than grind out the pennies doing busy work for days.

Don't get too cocky though. If you do go for this sort of massive upgrade early on, you have to remember that repairing

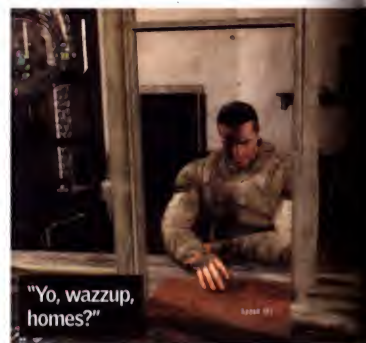




He's not as vicious as he looks. He's far more vicious than he looks.



Mr Chernobyl 2010.



"Yo, wazzup, homes?"

## SUBLIME TO SUBSTANDARD

*Call of Prip'yat's visuals in a nutshell*



Pretty.



Pretty shit.

When things go right, they really do take the breath away. Don't go reaching for the asthma medication, though, I mean that metaphorically. When lighting is involved, *Call of Prip'yat* looks gorgeous, trees casting huge shadows and the scenery being something you can lose yourself in.

Then you step into a building and the illusion is shattered. It's because lighting is either at a minimum or far less effort has been made to jazz things up. Yes, this is a post-apocalyptic world with crappy, wrecked buildings, but still, the jarring effect of going from one extreme to the other epitomises the game and the extreme positive/negative dysfunction.



Some pylons.

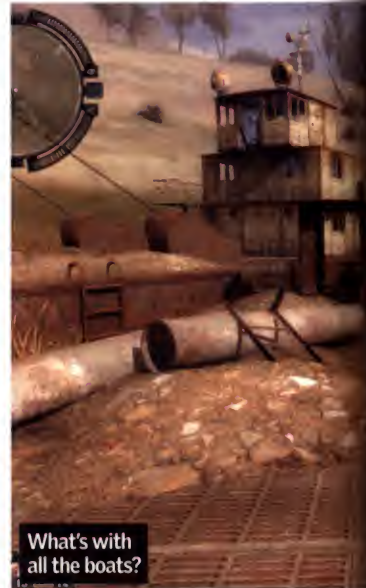
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What's with all the boats?

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Don't get too cocky though. If you do go for this sort of massive upgrade early on, you have to remember that repairing





"Just as I thought.  
It's a helicopter."



"Not the Toilet  
Duck again!"

traders will sensibly only purchase items that are in reasonably good nick. Pick up a clapped out old rifle from a zombie and you'll have to actually spend more than you'd make to make it saleable.

So *Call of Pripjat* is a difficult one. It's clearly a better game than *Clear Sky* and the original, plus it's definitely more accessible, being as the easier settings are actually made with non-experts in mind. The graphics are generally better and, despite the potential performance issue I flagged earlier, it is more stable and robust than its predecessors. The additions are all welcome, with nothing that feels tacked on or unnecessary. Artifact hunting is more interesting and enjoyable too. So why the lower score?

It's because playing *COP* is just like playing the original. Nothing has really moved on, even if that means the game itself is still just as engaging and good as ever. But we expected more and we wanted more than just a glorified update. If at any point while ploughing through the previous games you experienced burnout, you definitely don't want to pick



Zombies are  
everywhere.

*COP* up. It's just going to reinforce all the negative things swirling around inside your mind. All the same problems are, basically, still there, albeit ameliorated slightly by a few new ideas, but there's nothing you won't have seen before. There are a few new mutants, but nothing mind-blowing.

However, if you haven't or indeed can't get enough of the Zone, everything you want is right here. The map is completely new, so there's loads of new bits to explore and Pripjat itself, with is one of the best things yet seen in a *STALKER* game. Things don't get much more atmospheric than sneaking about the deserted streets when it's pitch black.

For this and many other reasons, *Call of Pripjat* is a great game. It's just sad that, with a bit more effort it could have been the eye-popping classic the series could create. **PCZ**

said suit will cost you a vast amount, should it get damaged.

Weapons and said armour can be upgraded quickly too, making it easier to work your belongings around your preferred playing style. A shotgun and a scoped assault rifle were my two main weapons of choice, with a sniper and pistol in reserve. There's still the issue of overloading yourself with ammo and weapons, but it seems to be more manageable than before.

Actually, there's little point raiding every single corpse for guns, because

**"With a bit more effort it could have been an eye-popping classic"**

## PCZONE

**GRAPHICS** Varies, mostly gorgeous  
**SOUND** Terrible voices, great general sound  
**MULTIPLAYER** Yes

- ✓ Full of radioactive goodness
- ✓ Can look stunning at times
- ✓ Lots of good new additions
- ✗ Very little real progress
- ✗ Too easy now?

# 80

Restraining order





Zombies despise a vivid colour-pallet.

## BORDERLANDS: THE ZOMBIE ISLAND OF DR. NED

### Brainless brain-eating fun



#### DEVELOPER

Gearbox Software

#### PUBLISHER

2K

#### WEBSITE

borderlandsthegame.com

#### ETA

Out now

#### PRICE

800 Microsoft points (£6.80)



#### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

2.4GHz processor with SSE2, 1GB System RAM (2GB for Vista), and a GeForce 7 series or higher/Radeon HD3000 series or higher.

**W**HILE ZOMBIES IN the media have become rather overdone, Gearbox have approached their first bit of DLC with spooky B-movie style panache, and created something equal parts charming and fun.

*The Zombie Island of Dr. Ned* puts you on a deserted island, picking up the pieces of the Atlas Corporation's failed mining operations. Said operations came to a halt when the population all turned into zombies, and you're on the payroll to sort it all out.

Naturally, this means killing hordes of zombies – and we do mean hordes. You're constantly mobbed by crowds of the undead, turning every combat situation into a frenzied gunfight.

The zombies have little AI beyond "go for the throat," which makes the



The loot goon (left) carries a chest on his back.

entire experience rather frantic when you're running low on health in the middle of the marshes. The quests themselves are great fun, too, and the eventual conclusion is both satisfying and utterly, utterly ridiculous.

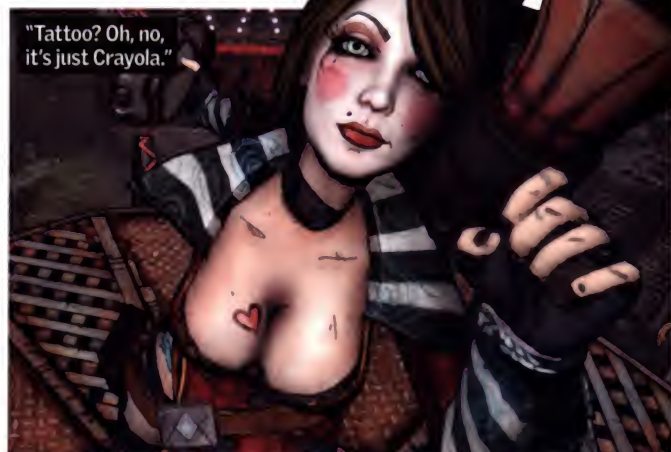
For the money, you get about six hours of surprisingly fun gameplay, set in a large outdoor playable area and linked locations, which hold quests that vary between killing WereSkags (a new critter) and chasing down medicine from a bin, and earn you a lot of experience and loot.

*Dr. Ned* is also playable from just about any level, as the content will scale to you dependant on what level you started the playthrough: for example, if you start at level 36, that's where enemies will start at – which is a great touch.

Adam Glick



Don't expect it to be this quiet for long.



"Tattoo? Oh, no, it's just Crayola."

## BORDERLANDS: MAD MOXXI'S UNDERDOME RIOT

### Gearbox's underwhelming DLC

#### DEVELOPER

Gearbox Software

#### PUBLISHER

2K

#### WEBSITE

borderlandsthegame.com

#### ETA

Out now

#### PRICE

800 Microsoft points (£6.80)



#### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

2.4GHz processor with SSE2, 1GB System RAM (2GB for Vista), and a GeForce 7 series or higher/Radeon HD3000 series or higher.

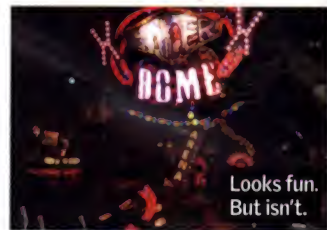
**C**ONVERSELY, THIS OTHER piece of *Borderlands* DLC is a repetitive, boring-as-shit arena grind. You see, it's a co-op expansion where you're placed in one of three areas to fight different foes, under conditions such as slowly draining health, low gravity, or only your pistols being effective.

Each section has between five and 25 rounds. Each round is made up of five waves, which take between two and five minutes. Said waves are always a normal wave, a 'gun' wave (full of gunners), a horde wave (lots of melee enemies), a badass wave (a selection of super-powerful foes) and a boss wave.

*Mad Moxxi's* is an overly-long, samey and furiously frustrating mess. All you do is kill the same kind of enemies in the same kind of arenas for hours at a time, and any death sends you back to the



The bosses always appear from behind the curtain.



Looks fun. But isn't.

beginning of a round. And there's no loot or experience from each kill (removing loot from *Borderlands* is as stupid as not breathing), and you've seen almost the whole expansion in the first hour.

With no save points throughout matches that can take two hours to complete, the entire thing feels like a hopeless, boring slog.

At best, this DLC is thoughtless, unoriginal and for those who simply must have two extra skill points. At worst, it's a waste of time and money, and poor form by Gearbox.

Adam Glick

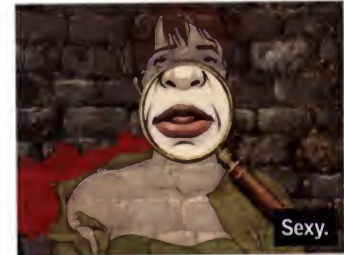
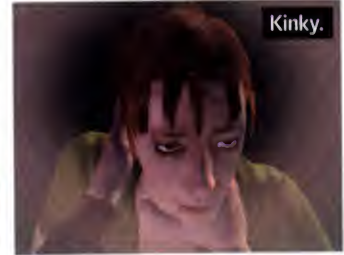


Don't bother: you won't earn anything.





"What do you know of dancing men, Holmes?"



# SHERLOCK HOLMES VS JACK THE RIPPER

David Brown spills his guts just for you...

**DEVELOPER** Frogwares

**PUBLISHER** Focus Home Interactive

**WEBSITE** [sherlockholmes-thegame.com](http://sherlockholmes-thegame.com)

**ETA** Out now

**PRICE** £19.99

## AT A GLANCE...

The more things change, the more Frogwares' Sherlock Holmes stay pretty much exactly the same with every single new iteration.

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:**  
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

### HOW IT STACKS

**SHERLOCK HOLMES: NEMESIS** 66%

**SHERLOCK HOLMES VS JACK THE RIPPER** 58%

**SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE AWAKENED** 50%

**W**HEN HOLMES MOUNTS Watson, you know you're in for something out of the ordinary. A real Victorian treat. But Holmes doesn't put it in him, that should be made clear. What he's actually doing is trying to determine how Jack the Ripper's the first murder took place, complete with adjustable strangulation movements and knife-slashing movements. It's like a little video editing suite, but with Holmes straddling Watson's lap and gyrating on top of him for a few awkward, silent minutes. Even Guy Ritchie didn't take these kinds of liberties.

But enough silliness, as those interested in things Sherlockian will be dying to know if this game lives up to the potential we all know is lurking within Frogwares' series. Sadly, it just makes nearly every single one of the same mistakes the previous ones did. The voice acting still borders on the criminal at times, the extras look like the Elephant Man's less attractive cousins and the opening section is one long series of pointless errands for bell-end characters who can't be bothered to walk 20 yards to pick up a satchel or something equally arbitrary.

When the game kicks into proper detective work, like deducing how a crime took place and other stuff related to that the game is much better. It just makes you angry that to get to these bits, you have to walk back and forth around the authentically dingy streets of Whitechapel running errands.

## HE'S NO BRETT

Frogware have tried to address some of the problems found in the other games, to be fair. This time, the streets of London aren't nearly deserted. They're not bustling, but at least they've made an effort to make it seem like people actually live there. Even though there doesn't seem to be a single house that isn't a total wreck. A body is found in the back garden of a ruined house, only for someone to then say "Yeah, me ol' mum lives there." Really? She'd die of exposure within days if she did.

Even with some effort being put in, the afflictions remain. It's painful to hear some of the characters speak and parts of it just look jarringly ugly. Is it time to give up on the 3D and go back to a lovingly drawn 2D approach? They've kind of done so with the option to go out of first-person and use a point-and-click

interface (though it doesn't work well) so there could be a willingness to address this next time, but we'll see about that.

As for now, this game can't be recommended, much as I want to do so for any Holmes game. It's just not good enough and, crucially, makes Holmes and Watson do things they just wouldn't do in the books. Which is, at the end of the day, the biggest flaw. **PCZ**

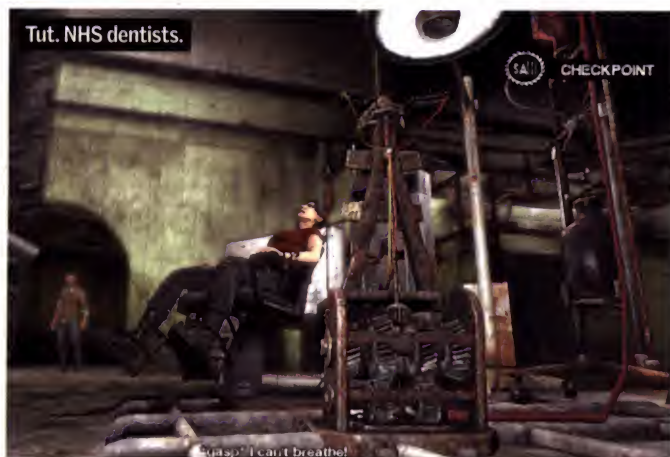
## PCZONE

**GRAPHICS** Variable  
**SOUND** Vomit-inducing acting  
**MULTIPLAYER** Holme alone

- ✓ It's Sherlock Holmes
- ✓ Enjoyable deduction sections
- ✗ Too much petty busy work
- ✗ Atrocious voice acting
- ✗ Not learned its lessons

**58**  
Unripping yarn





## SAW

"Do you want to play a game?" No, not really...

**DEVELOPER** Zombie Studios  
**PUBLISHER** Konami  
**WEBSITE** [konami.com/games/saw](http://konami.com/games/saw)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £35.99

### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Pentium 4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, and an NVIDIA GeForce 6600+ or ATI X1300+ or better graphics card.



**T**HIS IS A game about sticking your hands in places where they shouldn't go. Not usual places like down ladies' bras and inside coffee machines while they're dispensing, but rather more sinister containers: commodes filled with used syringes, barrels of corrosive acid, and the chest cavities of living people. It's inside these things that nefarious antagonist Jigsaw has hidden the dozens of keys, cogs and fuses you'll need to move through his retrofitted insane asylum.

There have been, to date, 4,000 SAW films. You need only have seen one of them to understand the appeal: people deemed guilty of some sort of moral infraction by Jigsaw are kidnapped and placed in extraordinarily sadistic situations. The most famous of these is one in which a girl's head has been placed in a reverse bear trap, primed to snap open and split her skull in two unless she can dig a key out of

her still-alive boyfriend's stomach. Thus, the torture porn genre was popularised, and we all pretended to be disgusted while we all secretly loved the guts.

SAW does a decent job of carrying over the horrific predicaments, but for the most part reduces them to panic-free quick-time events. Third-person melee combat is slow and clunky, the environments are bland and (though it makes sense considering you spend the game trying to escape one building) repetitive, and the same handful of puzzles (like the stick-your-hand-in-something-icky puzzle, and one where you've got to align numbers in mirrors) are wheeled out over and over again.

If you've watched every SAW film while breathing heavily and stroking your underparts, there'll be something here for you. Otherwise, with some ropey PC controls SAW's something of a gory stinkpot.

**Adam Glick**



## LEGO INDIANA JONES 2: THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

*Kingdom of the Plastic Skull*

**DEVELOPER** Traveller's Tales  
**PUBLISHER** Lucasarts  
**WEBSITE** [lucasarts.com/games/legoindianajones2](http://lucasarts.com/games/legoindianajones2)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £19.99

### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Intel Pentium 3 1GHz, 256MB (512MB Vista), and a 128MB graphics card.



**A** WHOLE NEW LEGO Indiana Jones? But there's only been one new movie – and it was terrible, a damaging performance by the nearly-dead Harrison Ford alongside the least threatening villain Lucas has ever created.

Well, while that may be the case, LEGO Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues is actually a re-imagining of the first game (which featured the first three films) plonked down alongside a plastic parody of Kingdom of the Crystal Skull. That's four films you can play through, with no re-used content. Fears of hastily bolted-on content allayed.

The idea behind the LEGO platform games is to mix some very basic platforming – running, holding down a button to automatically construct objects from bits of the Danish bricks, and whipping things – with some seriously clever, irreverent parody of key scenes from the films. The silent magic still works, surprisingly enough, and the joy here is in seeing how Traveller's Tales have turned notable scenes upside down in search of a quirky angle.

LEGO Indy 2 adds, most notably, a powerful level editor, in which you can build entire adventures. Oddly, it's been ported wholesale from the console

version, in which you control a builder character rather than a mouse cursor, meaning it's an arduous slog to build even the most basic constructions. Other than that addition, Indy's now got some extra whipping skills, and access to an increased roster of pilotable vehicles – meaning Indy and Mutt's motorcycle ride through the library is recreated right down the very last brick.

These are marginal additions, and it feels that LEGO Indy 2's only replaces and updates the original, rather than supersedes it. If you own the first, then there's little reason to upgrade. That sort of cold logic doesn't apply to children, of course, so if you're a child, or own one, there'll be no disappointment in here. They probably won't even realise they're playing through the first three films again. Tiny idiots.

**Adam Glick**







## ZOMBIE DRIVER

### Driving over Miss Zombie repeatedly

**DEVELOPER** EXOR Studios  
**PUBLISHER** EXOR Studios  
**WEBSITE** [zombiedriver.com](http://zombiedriver.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £6.99

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**  
1.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 128MB graphics card. Pixel Shader 3.0 support required.

**I**F YOU HAVE to commute into a city every morning, you've probably come across quite a few zombie drivers in your time. You might even have been one of them, stuck in a life of purest drudgery, yearning for the end of the day when you sink back in your chair and play some games again. *Zombie Driver* isn't about commuting or traffic jams, it's decidedly more invigorating than that (for a while). It's basically like the original top-down *Grand Theft Auto* games, where you're this guy who drives around rescuing civilians and quirky individuals from various places under siege by the undead.

You can kill the zombies by either running them down, which can lead to them swarming your vehicle if you rush into a large crowd, or using a variety of weapons to take them out from distance, like rocket launchers and machine guns. As you progress, you earn money to buy upgrades and unlock new vehicles, but there's not a great deal more to it than this.



Sure, there are tricks, stunts and combos to pull off, plus the city is fairly explorable, but at the end of the day, there's not much you'll be doing towards the end that you won't have done lots of times at the start. There is a funky little mod available from the developer's website, which allows for the game to be played in darkness, save for the headlights of your vehicle.

There's nothing wrong with *Zombie Driver* sticking to a simple concept and running with it. There are only 17 story missions, with some side quests in them, to plough through, so it's doesn't outstay its welcome. These missions basically just consist of selecting a weapon (you can only carry one) then driving to the location marked on the screen. Once there, you kill some zombies, maybe find an armour power-up, and drive back to the start. Repeat and you've done everything the game's asks of you. That said, running over zombie dogs is always fun, which is recommendation enough.

**Adam Glick**



## SACRABOAR

### A 12-boar shotgun of a game or just a bit of a pig?

**DEVELOPER** Makivision Games  
**PUBLISHER** Makivision Games  
**WEBSITE** [sacraboar.com](http://sacraboar.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £17.99

**MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**  
2.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

**T**HE FUNNY THING about *Sacraboar* is that it's got all the ingredients to make a really fun RTS game, except it isn't a really fun RTS. It's actually a bit dull if it doesn't strike you in the right way.

First of all, it looks pretty awful. This shouldn't make that much of a difference, but it does – especially as this isn't a budget buy. Then you've got the problem of a huge number of options available for players – leagues, cups, dozens of challenges and skirmish modes – and that's before mentioning the multiplayer side of things.

Why more choice and loads of options is a problem comes down to the fact the meat of the game is repetitive. In basic terms, two sides go up against each other and attempt to steal the other team's flag, which in this case is a big floating pig symbol. Return the pig to your own base and you get a point, winning the match (usually) when you've done this three times. Beyond building spell towers to give you extra



abilities (shields, healing, damaging spells) that's pretty much your lot.

Makivision have tried to give you more things to do in the challenges section, with a bountiful collection of different modes to try out. There's a mode that focuses solely on attacking, one for defence and so on. Our favourite is Instability, which throws a spanner into the works by eroding structures over time, eventually destroying them, making you work faster to achieve your goals. But, again, it's still just doing the same thing again and again.

If the game had been less than a temer, it might have been worthy of your time, but at nearly £20, it's not worth bothering with, unless you're absolutely obsessive about cartoony RTS games or pork.

**David Brown**

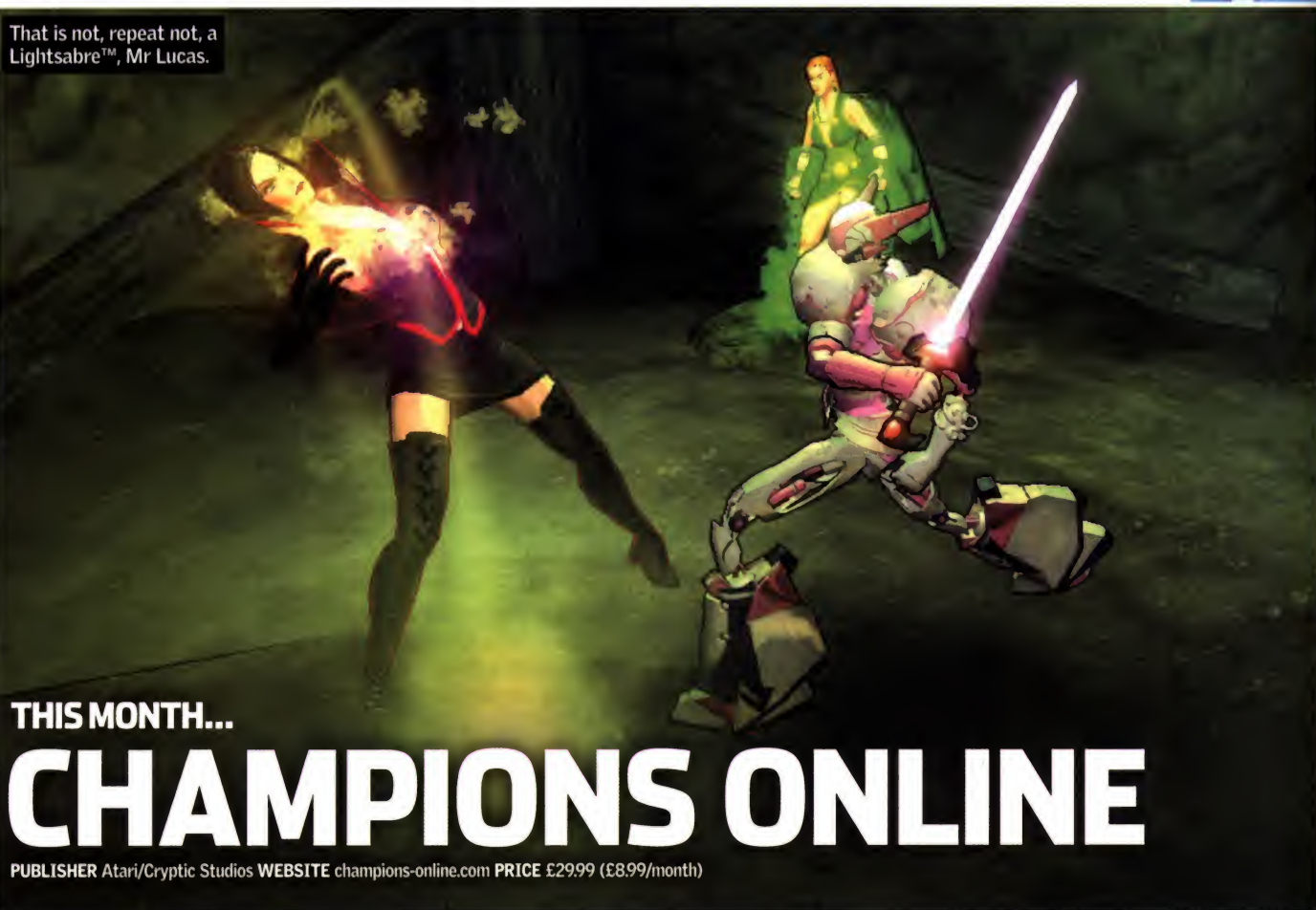




# State of Play

We look at the changes made to games after their release...

That is not, repeat not, a  
Lightsabre™, Mr Lucas.



THIS MONTH...

## CHAMPIONS ONLINE

PUBLISHER Atari/Cryptic Studios WEBSITE [champions-online.com](http://champions-online.com) PRICE £29.99 (£8.99/month)

**WHEN IT LAUNCHED,** *Champions Online* hit all the same buttons that its predecessor, *City of Heroes*, hit. Hours of fun designing and redesigning (and re-redesigning) superhero costume ideas, sketching out backstories for how Captain Thistleface was struck by radioactive plant seeds while on holiday in Inverallochy and mutated into the tartan-hued monstrosity of justice he is today, and working your way through the annoyingly repetitive tutorial each time until eventually you could do it blindfolded.

Unfortunately, what happened to almost all of us after that was the age-old story of repetitive grind-based gameplay and the rapid discovery that no matter what type of hero we created,

however plotted his story and moral compass, everybody was doing the exact same missions as everyone else in more or less the exact same order, each and every time. All pretence at this being a virtual world of heroes was gone and everything boiled down to being little more than a colourful fight box in tights.

### MISTRESS LETDOWN

Much was promised by Cryptic prior to launch, about new content and extra gameplay, but possibly due to attention and/or resources being diverted to *Star Trek Online*, the promised content has yet to appear and players are getting bored of the grind.

Aside from the Nemesis Lair addition there's been precious little beyond the existing high-level zones to play with for

dedicated heroes, meaning the over-praised character creation system is getting more use than it should (and if you think I'm saying 'over-praised' to be contrary, take a look at the videos of the creator being used in *APB* to see how truly detailed a character builder can be).

There's been a distinct lack of quality control too, with game-crippling bugs such as entire zones going dead, trapping players' character inside. Almost unforgivable in a modern game.

What has been added then? Well, the Nemesis

Lair. Ostensibly an end-level, repeatable raid zone, it sees you and your team, er, teaming up against a... team... of all your nemeses (nemesii?) at once. Which sounds like a great idea – and is. Once.

Twice, max. But once the thrill of seeing Demon Thora Hird (what?) joining forces with whatever absurd notions sprung from the minds of your in-game friends when they created their lifetime foes has worn off, it quickly turns into yet another in the long line of MMO grind zones that becomes little more than a nightly routine of spamming the same keys time and time again for much the same loot.







Nice ice sculpture.

## "Annoyingly, *Champions Online* offers many glimpses of fun"

64% – Paul Presley, PC ZONE #213

The argument that "Hey Prezzer, shut the hell up! All MMOs are like that eventually. Why pick on CO?" would have merit if there had been any attempt by Cryptic in any of the released updates and game patches to address the lack of much-needed characterisation, gameplay variety, or storytelling in a game whose subject matter is all about telling stories. Unfortunately, despite all the goodwill and faith shown by the game's adherents in the early months, all Cryptic seems to be willing to add to the game is one or two more instanced zones in existing areas to repeatedly hammer your attack keys in and occasional seasonal events.

Since its launch, *Champions Online* has also seen *Blood Moon*, a Halloween-themed attack of zombies that also introduced a range of angelic healing powers; and *Attack of the Misfit Toys*, a Christmas affair with evil Teddy Bears. Which sounded great and did add a change of pace to the usual fare, but have both since been removed (although will presumably be resurrected at the appropriate times of 2010).

### NEED... RETCON...

Despite the novelty, they quickly fell into the same pattern of all-out attack as any other option in the game. And it's here that it becomes very plain to see just how limiting the underlying framework that makes up *Champions Online* really is, and how little Cryptic seem to either be willing or able to change that.

The basic gameplay mechanics, which to many observers were clearly flawed from an MMO perspective, simply don't

seem to be going to change any time in the near future.

This should also be a worrying warning shot across the bows for everyone eagerly waiting for *Star Trek Online* and who, having witnessed the beta, have been flooding the forums there with comments along the lines of "Well it's just beta. There'll be plenty of time to alter things once it goes live."

If the history of *Champions Online* is anything to go by, once the game's basic template is in place, the only things that change are the stats. Sometimes, as the many empty superhero tights that now litter the crime-filled streets of Millennium City will attest to, that simply isn't enough. **PCZ**

### VERDICT

With none of the major issues addressed and no sign of any major-scale changes on the horizon, *Champions Online* has settled into a rut and looks like staying there. The game is distinctly a less heroic proposition than it promised to be.

**Paul Presley**

### THE STORY SO FAR... CHAMPIONS ONLINE



#### EARLY SEPT 2009

Launch, and the joys of bored *City Of Heroes* players could be heard across the world.

#### MID SEPT 2009

Cryptic release the game's first major patch, adding new missions, enemies, bug fixes, and, best of all, the option to skip the tutorial.

#### LATE SEPT 2009

Criticisms of content lack addressed by new mission chains that feel suspiciously like they should have been in at launch.



#### OCTOBER 2009

*Blood Moon* hits and brings with it healing powers that also felt like a launch oversight. Also, zombies.



#### NOVEMBER 2009

The Nemesis Lair gives your created bad guys something to do other than pop out at random points in the main game and shout "Boo!"



#### DECEMBER 2009

Christmas Event! Teddy Bears and soldier toys go evil and threaten to ruin the festive season.



Demons queue up to attack.



# Budget

Richard Cosgrove skinflints his way through gaming's cheap seats

## UFO: AFTERSHOCK

PUBLISHER 1C Publishing WEBSITE [ufo-aftershock.com](http://ufo-aftershock.com) PRICE \$9.99 (£6.25)

**T**HIS IS THE sequel to *UFO: Aftermath*, which we saw in last issue's Budget pages. While *Aftermath* was in some ways a cut-down version of *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, *Aftershock* adds strategic elements to *Aftermath*'s gameplay, making it closer to a *Command & Conquer*-style RTS than the original *X-Com*.

In *Aftershock* you launch missions to the Earth's surface from a space station.



**THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...**



Steve skated to work in the arctic weather. **SAVING** £50

David went back to Peru to avoid the cold. **SAVING** Frostbite



Richard stayed indoors, hugging a radiator. **SAVING** Nothing

The few remaining humans left on Earth are split into factions who can supply you with the resources and soldiers you need to fight the aliens. If you fail to be diplomatic and they'll send you crap recruits or less goods you need to build stuff.

Squad and soldier management is also vastly improved over that in *Aftermath*. You can set up five squads, giving you the chance to build specialist teams for different missions – one for infiltration, another for assaults, etc. Also soldiers can be levelled up in 12 classes ranging from the usual Commando and Snipers, to the exotic Cyborgs and Psionics (psychics).

Base building returns in *Aftershock*. Rather than stumbling across military installations you can appropriate (as in *Aftermath*), factions will give you a plot to build a base. Here you can build medical facilities (to heal your teams), labs (to research alien gear, new weapons, and history) and factories (to make stuff), once you've developed plans

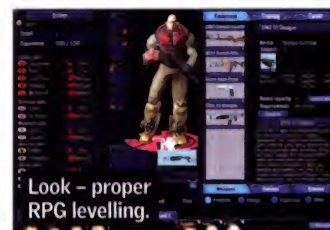
for the relevant building.

Combat is the same as in *Aftermath*: pause-move-pause. While this mix of RTS and turn-based gameplay is similar to combat in *Baldur's Gate*, and recently *Dragon Age*, *Aftershock*'s system is just annoying. Every time a soldier completes an action the game pauses, so you can give the soldier new instructions. This is vital, as they lack even basic AI, so if you fail to tell them exactly what to do (like,

shoot at aliens that pass by them) they'll stand still while monsters eat them. But if you can get used to having braindead soldiers, combat becomes gripping.

The graphics haven't aged well (its maximum resolution is 1024x768), but they're colourful and serve well enough.

*Aftershock* has improved on the original games immensely. While it has a steep learning curve, you'll end up losing hours to this war game.



**PCZONE**  
**72**  
Strategic joy

**BUDGET  
GAME  
OF THE  
MONTH**



The three types of soldier: human, cyborg and baldie.



# RIVEN: THE SEQUEL TO MYST

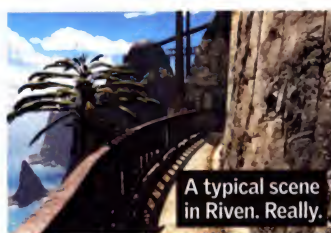
PUBLISHER Cyan Inc WEBSITE [cyanworlds.com/products/riven](http://cyanworlds.com/products/riven) PRICE \$5.99 (£3.20)

**HERE'S A REVIEW** of *Riven* in four words: It's *Myst*, but better.

Set in *Myst*'s fantasy universe *Riven* sees you tasked with imprisoning a wizard in a book that contains a broken LCD, to free a woman who can evacuate the residents of Riven before it destroys itself. Got that? So you start off being teleported into a cell. While you're stuck there an oriental lad steals your magic prison book and is promptly assassinated

by a ninja wearing sunglasses. He keeps the book and releases you from your cell. And all this in glorious 640 x 480 FMV.

From then on you're in *Myst* territory, flick-screening around an archipelago solving puzzles. But *Riven* stands out from the original in two ways: it's stunningly beautiful, with FMV making everything believable, and puzzles are designed as part of the environment, rather than being dumped in your path.



A typical scene in Riven. Really.

Having the same gameplay as *Myst* means *Riven* shares the same faults: solving puzzles can involve staring at your monitor while randomly clicking stuff. And if logic puzzles aren't your thing, this game will make you feel stupid. But people who want to something off-beat to play, *Riven* makes a fine choice.

PCZONE  
64

# THE BARD'S TALE

PUBLISHER inXile Entertainment WEBSITE [thebardstale.com](http://thebardstale.com) PRICE £6.99

**A LONG, LONG** time ago, in a OS far, far away, there was a game called *Bard's Tale*. Back in the days when hard disks were rumours and DVDs things of science-fiction, this series defined the RPG genre.

Twenty years later this re-imagining delivered 3D graphics, *Carry On...* humour, and a sharp headbutt to fantasy tropes. Take this: the tutorial mission in has you killing a giant rat in the cellar of an inn. So far, so cliché you think, until

you see this giant rat would dwarf a rhino and breathes fire.

Added to this healthy disrespect for all things Tolkien is double-entendre laden dialogue; a dickish anti-hero of a main character; and squad-based combat that lets you use an imaginative range of a dozen or so summoned allies.

But this good work is gutted by *The Bard's Tale* being the laziest console port we've seen. WASD don't move the Bard, they zoom the camera in and out and

turn it. Moving the Bard involves right-clicking the destination, but this only works if there's nothing in the way. As there's no pathfinding AI, if the Bard walks into an object he stands frozen.

Add to this is the camera's angle (a few degrees from top-down, creating a vertiginous sensation) that can't be adjusted, which makes looking around areas impossible. Especially annoying when the Bard runs behind a wall, and is blocked from sight.

The final insults are a checkpoint save system (there's no excuse for this, as keyboards have over 800 key combos that could be set to quicksave) and ugly, PS2 graphics. This is a decent game destroyed by really lazy porting.

PCZONE  
30



Oh look. Wolves. How original.



Looks stunning, no? Well, no.

## AND THE REST...

The other cheap releases out now



**THE MANHOLE: MASTERPIECE EDITION**

\$5.99 (£3.20), GOG  
Aimed at kids, this flickscreen game will charm adults.

55



**COMBAT MISSION: BEYOND OVERLORD**

\$9.99 (£6.25), GOG  
Graphically basic, but a tough RTS for veteran strategists.

65



**BUILD-A-LOT 4**

£6.99, Steam  
A very casual *SimCity* clone. Suited to younger players, or those who don't like thinking.

41

## PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



**MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**

£10, White Label  
The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



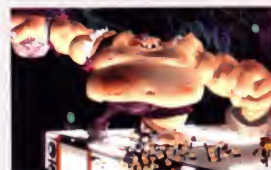
**FAR CRY**

£5, Sold Out  
With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



**THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND**

£5, Mastertronic  
If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse than this epic, sprawling classic.



**PSYCHONAUTS**

£10, Steam  
You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



**SID MEIER'S PIRATES!**

£5, Sold Out  
That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.



# Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

## PCZ TOP 5 FIGHTS TO THE DEATH

- GORDON FREEMAN VS DUKE NUKEM**  
Our money's on Freeman.
- LARA CROFT VS RSPCA**  
The charity's rage will ensure victory.
- L4D CAST VS L4D2 CAST**  
The chainsaws will make all the difference.
- PETER MANDELSON VS PIRATES**  
No contest really...
- BIG DADDY VS SHIRLEY CRABTREE**  
How could the real Big Daddy lose?



## PCZ TOP 5 NAUSEATINGLY CUTE GAMES



- PEGGLE**
- DRAGONICA**
- PIPPA FUNNELL SERIES**
- BARBIE DIARIES**
- HELLO KITTY ONLINE**

## PCZ TOP 5 THINGS WE MISS\*

- WRITING CONFIG.SYS FILES**
- BOOT DISKS**
- CGA AND EGA GRAPHICS**
- TEXT ADVENTURES**
- 5.25IN DISKS**

\* OK, we don't really

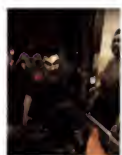
## FPS



### HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



### LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%

The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what L4D provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



### TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%

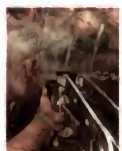
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



### LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 94%

Basically, this is Left 4 Dead in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new Infected, new campaigns, as well as machetes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.



### FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90%

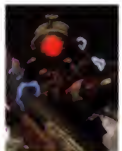
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, Far Cry 2 offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



### CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

PCZ Issue: 215 - 94%

Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



### BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%

This prison of System Shock 2 will suck you right into its intricate, frightening, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

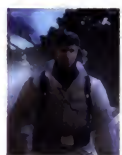
## STRATEGY



### EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best Total War game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the Total War series. It really is that good.



### COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



### WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%

A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



### CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A *Buyer's Guide* without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



### SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91%

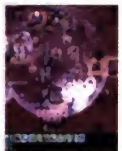
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



### MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



### SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%

Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

## ACTION/ADVENTURE



### GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%

We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



### MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

Payne is getting old, but we had to wait how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a growling voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



### GEARS OF WAR

PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%

*GOW's* tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



### FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



### PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



### BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



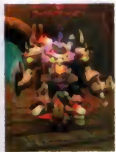
### BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 - 89%

Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, *Arkham Asylum's* mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best Batman game we've ever seen.



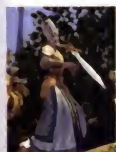
## MMOs



**WORLD OF WARCRAFT**  
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%  
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



**THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE**  
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%  
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



**WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING**  
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%  
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



**GUILD WARS**  
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%  
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



**EVE ONLINE**  
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%  
*Elite Online* has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

## SIMULATION



**X3: REUNION**  
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%  
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



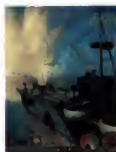
**IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES**  
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%  
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Cocks away, comrade!



**THE SIMS 3**  
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%  
*The Sims 3* is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious dicta, or a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



**MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X**  
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%  
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



**OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING**  
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%  
Like its peer *Arma II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

## DRIVING/RACING



**GTR2**  
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%  
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



**COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT 2**  
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%  
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



**BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX**  
PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%  
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



**RACE DRIVER: GRID**  
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%  
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



**NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT**  
PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%  
The *Need For Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

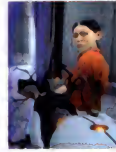
## ODDBALL



**SPORE**  
PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%  
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



**WORLD OF GOO**  
PCZ Issue 201 – 90%  
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



**PORTAL**  
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%  
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



**GARRY'S MOD**  
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%  
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



**BRAID**  
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%  
*Braid* is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

## SPORT



**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**  
PCZ Issue: 214 – 88%  
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.



**PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010**  
PCZ Issue: 214 – 85%  
The football industry may ignore *PES*, but *PES* doesn't ignore PC users. This year's *PES* includes updates from the console release, something that *FIFA 2010* can't claim.



**NBA 2K10**  
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%  
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



**FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE**  
PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%  
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



**CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010**  
PCZ Issue: 214 – 80%  
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

## ROLE-PLAYING



**THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**  
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%  
*Oblivion*'s sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



**FALLOUT 3**  
PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%  
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



**DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**  
PCZ Issue: 214 – 93%  
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare has secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.



**THE WITCHER**  
PCZ Issue: 188 – 88%  
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With an epic story that pushes you into moral dilemmas, this RPG came out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



**DEUS EX**  
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%  
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

## RICHARD'S PICK



**THE WITCHER**  
PCZ Issue 188 – 88%  
Being an old-time P&P RPGer – the kind which involves rolling funny shaped dice and talking to real-life people in person – I've always enjoyed CRPGs. But none have met my expectations since *Baldur's Gate II*. That is until *The Witcher* arrived.  
This game from then-unknown CD Projekt was plainly stunning: based on Andrzej Sapkowski's original reworkings of fairy tales and standard Tolkien tropes, this game featured intense tactical combat, drugs, sex, and – most importantly – a damn good story.  
*The Witcher*'s setting is a world where morality is a complex, shifting mass that lacks any clear definitions of good and evil. This is a world where an antihero is the good guy by default. By forcing you to choose between taking the side of medieval Nazis, literally inhuman terrorists, or staying out of the conflict and allowing a civil war to break out, *The Witcher* forces you to consider your actions and their effects. And not just on the wider world – each choice you're offered has a personal consequence for you in the game: help a woman out early in the game, and you get an ally later on; choose the wrong lover, and you make an enemy.  
And boy, were there a lot of women. In various states of nakedness. As well as threesomes with eager nurses. Yes, *The Witcher* is a truly great game.

## DAVID'S PICK



**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**  
PCZ Issue 214 – 88%  
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearing missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact your imagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of *Excel*. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.  
Like a good book, *FM2010* goes beyond the mere dry presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand.  
Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins. Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

**INCOMING!**

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 22 for the full run-down.



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**PCZONE**

# Hardware

Better gaming through technology

## RIVALRY

**I**'D BEEN HOPING to write enthusiastic things about Fermi, NVIDIA's upcoming DirectX 11 technology unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show, and due on shelves in March. Not because I believe ATI deserve to be taken down a peg, but because we need some competition.

Millions of DX11 capable GPUs were sold after Windows 7's launch. Even allowing for products being out of stock, or up in price due to supply problems, it's clear that a massive number of people are desperate for the latest cards. Sales were up 40%.

Where do all DX11 cards come from? Why, it's ATI, top to bottom. And while NVIDIA are sticking with the promise that their GF100 chip will bloody the nose of every rival, and that the new GeForce GPU, with its transistor count double that of any Radeon, really is in production, nobody knows exactly how it stacks up against the competition.

Flagship products will appear first in very deliberate act of marketing that enables forum dwellers to grunt over benchmark results and then bicker about which brand has the fastest card.

Trouble is, few people buy the fastest card. Most go for £120 mainstream variants, and for the mainstream variant of a new GeForce you'll be waiting months.

It means that even if Fermi reclaims the speed title for NVIDIA, everyone's still going to be buying Radeon's cards.

*Wand*

Phil Wand

Hardware editor

## COMING RIGHT AT YOU

3D tipped to be the biggest must-have tech for 2010

**W**ITH THE SUCCESS of *Avatar* (the movie, not the game) and the advent of high-frequency LCD monitors, it finally looks as though it's an idea that'll catch on. Shipments of 3D TVs and monitors are predicted to pass 64 million units in the next five to 10 years.

Historically, 3D technology has come in various guises: many of us have fond memories of fishing the blue and red cardboard glasses out of our Frosties. Today spectacles feature Active Shutter technology that's not only capable of replicating remarkable effects in a home environment, but is also able to turn 2D material into 3D. NVIDIA's 3D

Vision kit contains software that automatically converts games and even films on YouTube into 3D.

Most importantly, industry giant Sony has made a commitment to put 3D products within reach of mere mortals within the next 12 months. They're developing videogames in 3D, will film the FIFA World Cup in 3D, and are



Coming to your nose, soon: battery powered wireless glasses.

going to launch 3D ready Blu-ray players and 40in, 52in and 60in BRAVIA 3D TVs.

Looks like 3D in the home is actually going to happen. [nvidia.com/3dvision](http://nvidia.com/3dvision)

## MEMORIAL TABLET

### They're trying to kill the desktop

**ANALYSTS ARE PREDICTING** that tablet computers will become a runaway success during 2010 – though they've been saying that since the first prototypes appeared at COMDEX nine years ago.

Larger than a smartphone, smaller than your laptop, tablets are designed to be all-purpose and for all the family, and thus are more likely to accompany users on their everyday travels.

That means we could see most everyday tasks – reading, browsing, emailing, posting stupid videos on the Facebook walls of your stupid friends – jump to tablets, with the home desktop PC reclassified as a media and gaming platform. [deloitte.com/tmt](http://deloitte.com/tmt)



Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer hugs a tablet at last month's CES.

## NEWS ROUND-UP

**BT INFINITY IS** a broadband product which offers speeds of up to 40Mbps, or 5MB every second. Trouble is, the new service has limited availability (only where BT has laid down fibre optic cables), costs £19.99 on an 18-month minimum contract (that's on top of BT's usual line rental of £11.54/month), and comes with a paltry 20GB usage allowance. When your fibre optic connection is sucking up 300MB per minute, you'll hit that cap in an hour. Get the £24.99 option instead to download all you dare. [bt.com/infinity](http://bt.com/infinity)

**MICROSOFT HAVE PATCHED** a hole in Windows that has existed since 1993. An attacker exploiting this hole in any 32-bit version of the platform – from NT right up to Windows 7 – could install programs, or even create new user accounts with full administrator rights. Get those updates downloading now. [windowsupdate.microsoft.com](http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com)

**WARNING:**  
**THIS MONTH'S**  
**HARD WORDS**

BY RICHARD COSGROVE

**INFINITY:** A cool-sounding, really big number that has loads of geek, techy and sci-fi connotations. **FIBRE OPTICS:** Contact lenses knitted by the elderly with the aim of keeping our eyes warm during these frosty winter months. **CES:** Consumer Electronics Sausage – a meat product around which tens of thousands of tech journalists gather to learn about the latest in gadgets and phones. You must be quiet though, as the sausage's voice is tiny and frail. **FACEBOOK:** Website containing photos of your ex-girlfriend, at some party or something... who's that bloke? Why is she standing so close to him? Why are they... oh god.



# Dear Wendy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

## PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? Wendy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wendy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: [wandy@dearwandy.com](mailto:wandy@dearwandy.com), including details about your problem and system specs.

## Q NEW PC

I have a fairly decent rig at the moment, but I'm starting to see the decline in gaming power so it's time for a new system in the next couple of months. I was thinking of going for a Core i7 machine to take advantage of DDR3 RAM and other recent niceties.

I was wondering about an ASUS S1366 Intel X58 ATX, Intel Core i7 975, two XFX GeForce GTX 260 896MB Black Editions in SLI, 3GB Corsair 1600MHz DDR3 CL8 RAM, Antec Black Twelve Hundred Case, XFX 850W Black Edition PSU, along with the addition of a 7200rpm 1TB hard disk drive, adequate cooling and Windows 7.

I have a budget of about £1,600 which is what my current configuration cost me. Is there anything that you

would importantly add, or just as importantly take away or exchange?

Any comments and advice to get the best for my money would be appreciated.

**Ben Marks**

**A** I've asked that 'There's no such thing as a future proof PC' gets inscribed on my gravestone (or magnificent marble tomb, should my phishing scam work) so that future generations may continue to gain knowledge from me after I've carked it.

**"There's little point going overboard on super-fast, super-pricy RAM"**

Fast? Hell yes. Good value? Don't be silly.

My death aside, let's talk configurations. I don't know what model ASUS mobo you're planning to use – you didn't say – but I'm guessing it's the £140 P6T. That would be a fine choice, though the components you've picked to partner it suggest that the capricious urges of online shopping have made you choose the £250 Rampage II Extreme instead. Honestly, don't bother with that.

I would scratch the twin GeForce GTX 260s in favour of twin Radeon HD 5770s or perhaps a single HD 5970, the latter of which has enough power to dirty laundry at five paces. While the GTX ain't bad, it's approaching obsolescence faster than electrons hitting a fluorescent screen, and it isn't wise to DirectX 11 anyway. Seeing as you'll be using Windows 7 and an i7 Extreme Edition chip, there's something slightly perverse about pairing last

year's video hardware with the forefront of everything else.

There's also little point going overboard on super-fast, super-pricy RAM. While you may have seen madmen on forums talking about their huge clocks, most owners give all that tiresome hertz-fiddling business a well-deserved wide berth. And I'd wager that the majority of Extreme Edition owners are more than delighted with



It's not a swanky brand, but it is an amazing screen.

## DRIVER WATCH

### GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 9.12	12 Dec 09
NVIDIA	Force Ware 195.62	27 Nov 09

### SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08



## "Keep the unit cost down by keeping the screen size down and buying more monitors"

the factory set speed of their CPU, it being the fastest processor on sale.

So my advice here is to stick with a known brand, reasonable timing DDR3-1333 module such as Corsair's PC3-10666 XMS3 CL7. Don't mess about with 3GB, making sure you get a 6GB (ie 3 x 2GB) kit instead and a 64-bit flavour of Windows.

I've some experience of the XFX supply, given that it's really a Seasonic unit. You may remember that Seasonic is one of those little known brands whose trumpet I have been tooting for years, and it's nice to know that many of today's highly regarded gaming PSUs are Seasonic engineered. Clearly I'm not just a spotty face.

### Q CHEERFULLY CHEAP

I'm looking for information on where I can buy a cheap base unit – a friend is looking for a replacement for his dying computer. Basically, he's looking for a PC that can run Windows 7, show web pages and edit Word documents all at the same time. It needs to be the cheapest PC there is. I offered to build him one, but he wants to have a three-year warranty.

I looked at Dell but the cheapest one I could find was £300. Can you help me find a cheaper one? In his shoes I'd build it myself so I don't know where to look!

**A** If your friend genuinely wants a cut-price PC for little else but browsing and word processing, and if secondhand or reconditioned gear from eBay isn't an option, then what he should look at is an entry level, Atom powered nettop such as the £175 Acer AspireRevo R3600, £190 Zoostorm NetTop Atom, £200 ASUS EeeBox PC B202, or a £250 Compaq CQ2300UK.

While these rock-bottom prices refer to models running either Linux or

XP, systems such as the AspireRevo make a big deal about being "Windows 7 upgradeable", though of course that does mean paying extra for the privilege of upgrading.

And on that subject, I don't understand the obsession with 7. While it's unarguably the best version of Windows yet, there's little point your mate craving it if all he's going to do is surf the web and compose letters. Because in that case, the end-user experience will be pretty identical regardless of whether he ends up using XP, Vista or hanging around until 2012 for the release of Windows 8.

My advice to him is that if he's working to a tight budget and doesn't want to waste money needlessly then he should not be so specific in his demands. Beggars can't be choosers!

### Q MISSING INCHES

For some time now, I've been looking to buy a great monitor. I've looked in your Hardware Guide and you talk up the NEC 24WMGX3 as an "incredible 27in monitor" for £529.

This is in my budget, so I went online to find the best price: only to discover that the 24WMGX3i is a 24in monitor. So, have you got the size wrong or the



Pretty much perfect for not playing games on.

## ALL ABOUT...

### 24 DISPLAYPORT

Typical. The moment we've finished chucking out our 15-pin VGA cables in preference for DVI ones, and a new connector arrives. It's called DisplayPort, and though it's been around for a few years, it's only recently turned up as a new connector on the back of certain Radeons, Apple, Dell, HP and Lenovo hardware, and on new Eizo and NEC screens. And you might well ask, given that we already have two choices of digital link – DVI and HDMI – why bother with another?

The fact is, DisplayPort is geared for gaming. And the enhanced DisplayPort standard ratified in January gives greater scope all round, including full HD 3D stereo displays and the ability to daisy chain up to four 1920 x 1200 monitors from one connection. It also has incredible capacity for data – well over 20Gbps – allowing it to carry Ethernet and USB 2.0 data. It even carries HD audio, such as Dolby MAT, DTS HD, and is compatible with all Blu-ray formats.

There's little point consumers dashing out to replace what they already have, but next time you're buying, look for DisplayPort.

The everything connection.



code wrong? Is there a fantastic 27in monitor out there for £500, or am I chasing ghosts?

Andrew Hanson

**A** I've given our Hardware Guide a thorough going over this issue, seeing as even the tiniest boo-boo can lead to serious confusion. In addition, time spent pondering what I'd buy myself over Christmas made me reconsider some of the choices, particularly as a few of the items mentioned – the 24in NEC screen being one of them – are hard to source, as they're no longer stocked by retailers. You'd certainly be pushed to find them on your local high street.

I've mentioned before that one of my favourite screens is the old 20in HP L2045w, and its more recent bigger brother, the 24in LP2475w, is unarguably one of the best monitors currently on sale. It's actually gone up in price since launch, but at £450 it's still a high-value, premium product.

With two dual-link DVI-I HDCP ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, S-Video and no fewer than six USB holes, this 1920 x 1200 widescreen peach is something you'll not need to change for 10 years and will give you pleasure each time you switch on. In addition, where the early models used primitive screen tech, any LP2475w you buy now will be of a later, superior type.

If you're looking for a bigger screen, Dell's £575 2709WFP would tickle your inner exhibitionist but there are issues with the screen having a slightly higher latency time for gaming and in which case you certainly would be chasing ghosts. Really, your only option for big-screen shooting is the Dell UltraSharp 3008WFP, but for that you will need a big budget: I've never seen it available for less than £1,000.

That said, with the advent of multi-screen capable hardware, such as ATI Eyefinity, I'd keep the unit cost down by keeping the screen size down and buying more of them. **PC!**

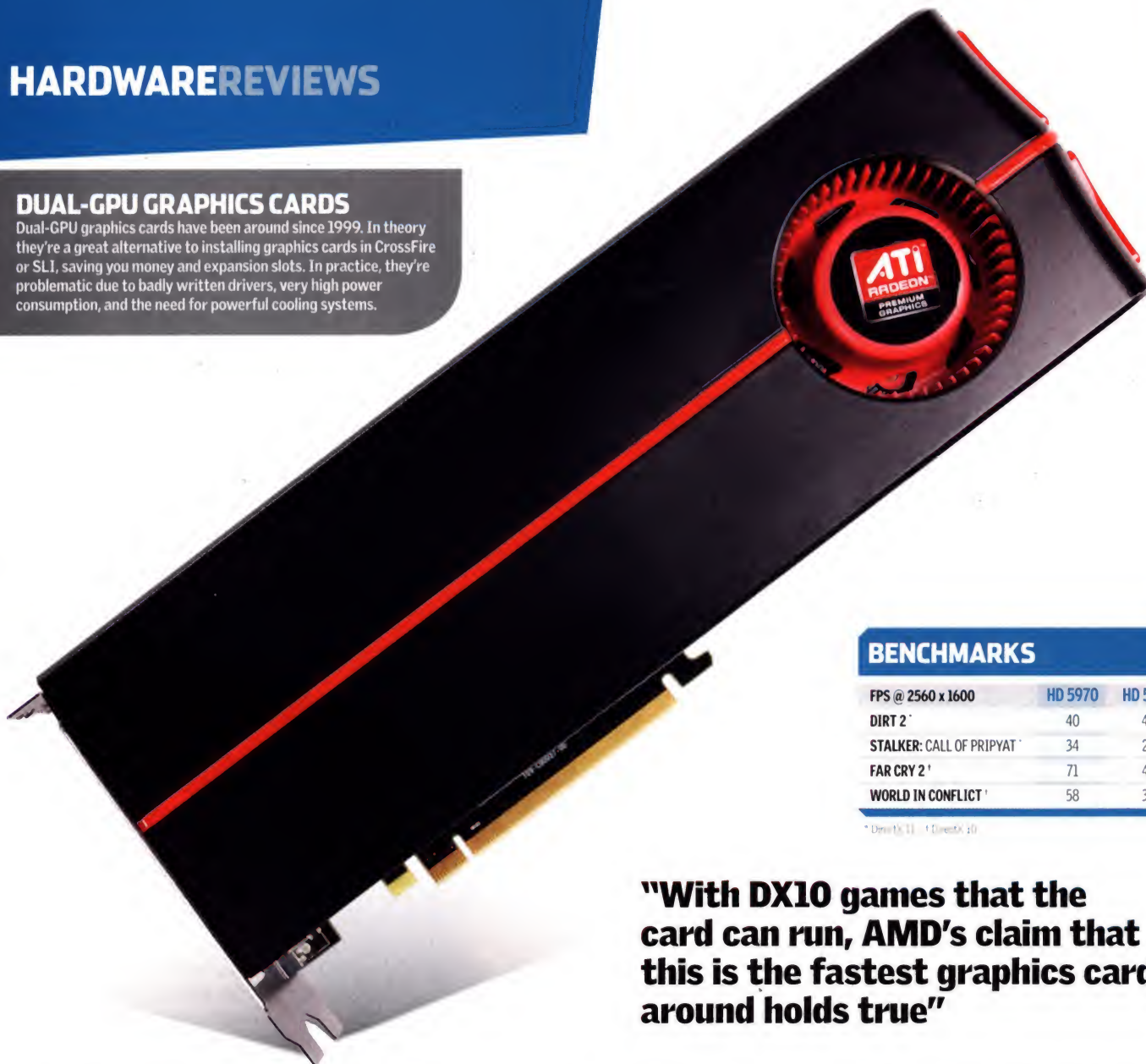
**FORUMS:**  
DIRECT FROM  
DEARWANDY.COM

(Goons) I bought my computer system three years ago now, and feel it must be time for an upgrade. It's a Q6600 based Dell Inspiron 530 with upgraded Radeon 4850 and PSU. Am I being premature in upgrading, as at the moment as I'm not noticing anything slowing down too much? (Rich) I'd generally always wait if you don't actually need to do the upgrade right now, most of the time technology will get cheaper and faster. Maybe stick a 5850 in it when more demanding games come out. (Goons) Is it worth upgrading memory to 800MHz? (tom\_hargreaves) I'd say the weak link in your system is the 4850, apart from that it's a pretty solid gaming rig. Do as Rich said and get a 5850.



## DUAL-GPU GRAPHICS CARDS

Dual-GPU graphics cards have been around since 1999. In theory they're a great alternative to installing graphics cards in CrossFire or SLI, saving you money and expansion slots. In practice, they're problematic due to badly written drivers, very high power consumption, and the need for powerful cooling systems.



## BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 2560 x 1600	HD 5970	HD 5870
DIRT 2*	40	40
STALKER: CALL OF PRIPYAT*	34	22
FAR CRY 2*	71	46
WORLD IN CONFLICT*	58	39

\* DirectX 11, 1 Core, 10

**"With DX10 games that the card can run, AMD's claim that this is the fastest graphics card around holds true"**

# AMD ATI RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £574 MANUFACTURER AMD WEBSITE amd.com

**AMD DESCRIBE THE 5970** as the fastest graphics card in the world. For once marketing spiel is correct, as it ran 50-55% faster than the 5870 HD – the fastest single-GPU card in the world – during our benchmark tests. Yet despite this, the 5970 underwhelms.

Add to that the fact that PC games are now developed to accommodate the ageing graphics hardware in consoles, means this card is overpowered. But

this impression fell away during our tests. During DirectX 11 benchmarking using *DIRT 2*, the card hit 40fps. While this is respectable the single-GPU 5870 manages 39.8fps, and to be honest, 0.2fps is not worth an extra £200. Then while it beat the 5870 by nearly 55% in *Call of Pripjat* (page 84) the 5890 was unable to run *Resident Evil 5*, bringing up the spectre of an old problem.

The performance of previous multi-GPU cards was hampered by serious driver problems; drivers that often appeared weeks after single GPU cards got theirs. Given that the tech in this card is new, some driver difficulties are to be expected – especially as *Resident Evil 5* is optimised for NVIDIA cards – but *DIRT 2* is made for ATI cards and DX11, so the 5970's 40fps benchmark is hard to excuse. But with DX10 games that

the card can run, AMD's claim that this is the fastest graphics card around holds true.

AMD is also touting the 5970 as the overclocker's card, claiming it has a high headroom for its performance to be boosted. This proved true as we were able to use third-party software to get an 80% increase in *Far Cry 2*'s frame rates over the 5870, and a 93% increase using the *UNIGINE Heaven* DX11 benchmarker.

In order to keep the card's power usage to under 300W AMD has limited the card to a 6-pin power connector. However, with the right PSU the card can take the 400W its cooler is designed to handle. AMD have said they'll release 5970s fitted with 8-pin PSU connectors in the Spring. These should be better for overclockers,

assuming that their cooler is changed from the noisy and inefficient model used in this model.

The 5970's price stops it being a viable purchase. Rather its performance and overclocking potential make it a demonstration of AMD's GPU design skills, and a rival to NVIDIA's upcoming DX11 Fermi cards. In short the cheaper ATI 5870 and 5850 cards are much better buys for everyday gamers. **DJ**

## SPECIFICATION

CPU	2x Evergreen
CORE SPEED	725MHz
MEMORY	2GB GDDR5
MEMORY SPEED	1GHz
SHADER UNITS	3,200





# ADVANCETEC AT-FX UNLEASHED

PRICE £553 MANUFACTURER AdvanceTec WEBSITE [www.advancetec.co.uk](http://www.advancetec.co.uk)

**AMD HAVE FINALLY** got processors which are competitive at competitive price points. And some also have extra cores that can be reactivated. And that's what AdvanceTec's Unleashed PCs are about.

AMD essentially use the same chips throughout their range, deactivating cores to make turn their quad core CPUs into triple and dual core models. This means you can buy a dual core AMD CPU, and find you've got a quad core lurking under your heat sink.

What AdvanceTec are now doing is picking out the AMD processors that can be unlocked, and using them in their Unleashed series. You're charged a slight premium because of the labour this involves, but to get an equivalent out-of-the-box AMD quad core into a PC would cost you almost £70 extra.

So by buying this Unleashed machine you get an AMD chip running stably at 3.1GHz with all four cores unlocked, and a cash saving.

The rest of this £550 PC's components are equally impressive: an AM3 motherboard, 64-bit Windows 7, and a 1,000W PSU means this machine is fairly futureproof. Even without adding more RAM and a new graphics card, the Unleashed is a real performer. *DIRT 2* and *Far Cry 2* both hit playable frame rates at 2560 x 1600.

While there are many £1,000 Core i7 and i5 rightly demanding attention, Advancetec's Unleashed shows you don't need to bankrupt yourself to secure a decent gaming setup. **DJ**

**PCZONE**  
**90**



## SPECIFICATION

CPU	3.1GHz Phenom II X2 550
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS AM3 M4A78T-E
GPU	BFG GTS250 OC
RAM	2GB DDR3 1600MHz
STORAGE	Seagate 500GB
OS	64-bit Windows 7 Home Premium

## BENCHMARKS

	UNLEASHED	STOCK
FPS @ 1680 x 1050		
FAR CRY 2	43	42
WORLD IN CONFLICT	32	39
SECONDS (quicker is better)	UNLEASHED	STOCK
CINEBENCH	68	129

# CYBERPOWER INFINITY I5 ACHILLES XT

PRICE £999 MANUFACTURER CyberPower WEBSITE [cyberpowersystem.co.uk](http://cyberpowersystem.co.uk)

**CYBERPOWER'S ACHILLES WAS** one of the first Lynnfield PCs we tested (issue 214, 82%). So far its remained our favourite Lynnfield rig because it offered great value. The Achilles XL doesn't compare well.

While Achilles XT's Core i7 860 uses Hyper-threading this can harm the performance of some games, make them run slower than if a Core i5 CPU was used. Turning off Hyper-threading is an option, but that takes away the point of having an eight-

threaded CPU. The i7 CPU is a boon for processor-intensive work (video editing, animation and the like), and in these tasks it easily outclasses the Achilles' i5.

The other big change between the Achilles and the XT is the exchange of a 22in monitor for a Blu-ray player. That display made the Achilles good value. While a Blu-ray player gives this PC more of an all-round edge, there's very little point in having one on a PC used for playing games.

CyberPower have struck the right balance between price and components with this all-round PC. But this isn't a rig for gamers. **DJ**

## SPECIFICATION

CPU	3.68GHz Core i7 860
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS P7P5D LE
GRAPHICS	XFx HD 4890
RAM	4GB DDR3 1333MHz
STORAGE	1TB
OS	64-bit Windows 7 Home Premium

## BENCHMARKS

	ACHILLES	ACHILLES XT
FPS @ 2560 x 1600		
ARMA II	20	18
FAR CRY 2	52	48
WORLD IN CONFLICT	50	46

**PCZONE**  
**79**





**REMEMBER:**  
ALWAYS CHECK  
FOR THE OBVIOUS  
PROBLEM FIRST

Is your PC not powering up? Then check its power cable is plugged in at the PSU and the wall socket. Is your new hard drive not registering? Check the power cable and data cable are plugged in. Is your mouse failing to control the cursor? Then... well, you get the idea.

# Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

## LOADED?

### GRAPHICS

#### ASUS RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £499  
uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for our top slot. Under that ugly plastic shroud are twin AMD RV870 chips, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the parking lot. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU. Add another and you'll need 1KW.



### PROCESSOR

#### INTEL CORE I7 975

PRICE £770  
intel.com



The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.

### SCREEN

#### HP LP2475W

PRICE £450  
hp.co.uk



You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?

### MOTHERBOARD

#### ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £259  
uk.asus.com



ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.

### SOUNDCARD

#### AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1

PRICE £119  
auzentech.com



There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.

### HDD

#### WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR BLACK 2TB

PRICE £220  
westerndigital.com



Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your *Steam* folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FAS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.

### SPEAKERS

#### LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £249  
logitech.co.uk



We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

## SKINT?

### GRAPHICS

#### SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X

PRICE £115  
sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings court technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire, the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.



### PROCESSOR

#### AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK

PRICE £122  
amd.com



With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.

### MOTHERBOARD

#### GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3

PRICE £49  
gigabyte.com.tw



Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2, and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.

### HDD

#### SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB

PRICE £33  
seagate.com



Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

### SCREEN

#### IYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2

PRICE £134  
iiyama.co.uk



Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.

### SOUNDCARD

#### NONE

PRICE £0  
N/A



If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.

### SPEAKERS

#### LOGITECH X-210

PRICE £25  
logitech.co.uk



Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver sub-assisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.



# DEMOCRACY AT PLAY.

VOTE IN THE PC GAMER TOP 100  
**WWW.PCGAMERTOP100.COM**

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THE WORLD'S **NUMBER ONE** PC GAMES MAGAZINE  
**PC GAMER**





PCZONE

# Freeplay

For the man who has nothing

## MECHA DELIGHT

**W**HAT'S THE WORST game you've ever played? It's a question I was asked recently and, to be honest, I couldn't give a straight answer. Just like the polar opposite enquiry about the best one, there are plenty of candidates. That recent exercise in excremental narcissism *Tunnel Rats* was what sparked this particular debate in the office. It really was utterly atrocious, but there are definitely worse games out there. I've played a lot in recent months, both free, not free and ones I've had to buy because their publishers refused to send in copies).

So, while I might not be able to name my worst game ever, although *Grey's Anatomy* is definitely down there competing vigorously for the title, you might be able to. Please fling us your suggestions and discussion to [letters@pczone.co.uk](mailto:letters@pczone.co.uk).

As for the main reason I'm actually here, free stuff is overflowing from our pages into your eyes, stinging the nerve endings in your brain with their "Play me!" demands.

There aren't any bad games here, just wonderful free gaming chunklets for your delectation. Of particular interest is the *Mechwarrior: Living Legends* mod, which is one of the best we've seen for a long time. It looks wonderful, thanks to the CryENGINE, which still blows me away every time I see it, it has to be said.

You see some of the crud that gets served up, both on PC and on consoles, and you wonder, three years or so on, how that game can just obliterate all of them. But yeah, big robots and explosions. Can't be bad.

David Brown  
Staff writer

Can someone translate that chat? Anyone?



These terrorists really do threaten the world.



Matching outfits: fashion faux pas.

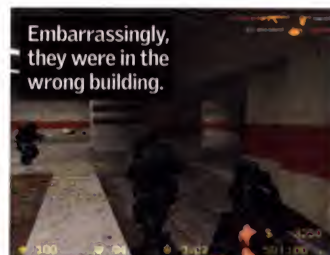
# BATTLE ROYALE

Global meta-gaming comes to *Counter-Strike: Source*, but will it catch on?

WEBSITE [finalbattleground.com](http://finalbattleground.com)

**M**UCH AS PEOPLE love it, play it beyond death and have babies with it, there are times when *Counter-Strike* can leave you a withered husk of a human being. There's not much point to it, in the end, beyond the immediate. This is where *Final Battleground* comes in, an attempt by Demonic Gaming to introduce a backdrop to your bullet-strewn online fisticuffs.

CS:S clans are duking it out for world domination, defending or attacking territories whose ownership depends on the results of 5v5 matches. Some are worth more than others, so London will be far more hotly contested than Dunnyon-the-Wold. In-game currency, Plinks, can be earned by holding territories for your clan or via the simple method of



Embarrassingly, they were in the wrong building.

killing people on servers with the *Final Battleground* software running on them, after registering with the main website.

There are a ridiculous number of stats, achievements, awards, medals, ribbons and other accolades up for grabs, both competitively in rankings tables and personally. So far, so simple, but there's a little more to it. Plinks are the lifeblood of a clan's attempts to secure domination,

but (this is the clever bit) there's no realistic way the small numbers in even the biggest clans could earn enough over long periods to maintain their supremacy.

That's where you, the non-clan member, the mercenary if you will, comes in. You'll also be earning Plinks every time you get a kill and the clans know it. It's their job to enlist your aid in their attempt to secure domination over more territories, making you and your ilk just as important as their regular footsoldiers at the end of the day. If you take a fancy to a clan, you can donate your Plinks to their cause. You can even do it in-game to make things easier.

*Final Battleground* looks great on paper. It gives serious and casual players a reason to compete, plus providing an interesting overview of global struggles between clans from different countries. Intriguingly, Demonic are in talks with other companies about using their software in other big-name titles.

**"Counter-Strike: Source clans are duking it out for world domination"**

PCZONE  
FREE-O-METER



Not free!

0  
HOURS

\*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Free!

398  
HOURS\*



Are they fools or entrepreneurs?

# MMO MONEY

The worth of real cash in made-up worlds...

WEBSITE [entropiauniverse.com](http://entropiauniverse.com)

**S**OME PEOPLE WOULD say it was insane to spend real-world money on MMO items and objects and, to an extent, that argument is valid. Imagine if, a few months back, one of your friends announced that he (or she) had just spent £100 on a laser from *Tabula Rasa*, and then discovered the servers were being shut down. Not the wisest investment ever, one might say. Yet this sort of behaviour is going on all around us. But is it really a silly idea to invest in MMO stock?

On the whole, yes it is, but consider the case of the asteroid-based nightclub Club NEVERDIE ([realityport.com](http://realityport.com)). In 2008, it was awarded the title of "Most Expensive Virtual Object" in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Its cost was an astonishing \$100,000, an investment that got the buyer – the avatar Jon Jacobs – a virtual resort

comprising a nightclub, sports stadium, shopping mall, biodomes, a space dock and a multitude of apartment buildings.

It's all fake, it's not like owning real real estate and yet after remortgaging his (presumably real) house to make the purchase, Jacobs has had the last laugh. The next day Jacobs was offered \$200,000 for the virtual complex, and it's made Jon Jacobs a celebrity in the world of MMOs and in real life (The *Los Angeles Times* has called him "the world's first cyber-superstar".) Internet chatter says the resort is now worth a staggering \$1,000,000.

Club NEVERDIE resides in the world of

*Entropia Universe*, a free-to-play MMO that is incredibly difficult to play if you don't spend real money. This is why investments like Jacob's make sense.

They definitely do to some guy called Buzz Erik Lightyear anyway, who recently spent a mind-boggling \$330,000 on a similar *Entropia Universe* property, the Crystal Palace Space Station. It probably won't host Arsenal's home games, but Buzz is still hoping to make a killing. "I believe Crystal Palace can be amazing since it won't just be owned by some investor, but instead by a very active, and very old player who loves *Entropia Universe*," he said. Only time will tell.



She may not be real, but she could be rich.

## SNIPPETS



### MOTION SICKNESS

You may need to take some Dramamine before playing this. *First Person Tetris* is a great idea and one that works well, but it doesn't half make your belly lurch about. Not one to be played for extensive periods of time.  
[firstpersontetris.com](http://firstpersontetris.com)



### GNOPPING HELL

If you ever wondered what *Pong* would be like if you could 'be the ball' then you've almost certainly got too much time on your hands. At least you can find out now, what with *Gnoping* being a game about just that. *Beat the Be Gone* level and we'll say "Zounds!" in your honour.  
[bitbattalion.com/games/gnoping](http://bitbattalion.com/games/gnoping)

## Bug Fix of the Month



**THIS MONTH**  
**OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING**

"Weapon torches now turn off properly."

## MOVIE OF THE MONTH

**BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**  
It's all guts for the *Bad Company* people, but there's quite a lot of glory to be had, you'd be surprised to hear. You wouldn't necessarily know it, because the crew are so intent on completing their mission, but they just love completing objectives and doing their superiors proud. Ish.



1 "There's a husky over there. Cover me while I go in."



2 "Dammit men, why didn't you tell Jenkins about the cliff?"



3 "See? There was even a sign telling you to watch out for it!"



4 "It's your fault Chief! Jenkins would've wanted it this way!"



# Demos



Adam Glick says, "demos are miniature games"



## AGE OF CONAN

Claim your ticket to Hyboria, on your free-dee-vee-deeeeee!

WEBSITE [ageofconan.com/trial](http://ageofconan.com/trial)

**F**ANCY TAKING A holiday this year? Tired of the same-old destinations? Fed up of seeing grown men sexually entwine themselves around lampposts in Ibiza or watching in horror as a rotund young lady collapses to the floor in a pool of her own vomit and/or urine? Then head over to the world of Hyboria, where the only vomiting is being done by the people who haven't taken up this new offer from Funcom.

If you install *Age of Conan* now, you'll get the first 20 levels for free! Now you'll finally be able to flex your Arnold-like muscles and smite your foes in a digital world that isn't Azeroth.

We're not sure if it's still got people on horseback kicking unsuspecting players off of bridges, but if you want to find out, and also enjoy finding out what the game's all about, you know what you have to do.

To register for your account while you wait for the game to install, visit [www.ageofconan.com/trial](http://www.ageofconan.com/trial).



### PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at [pczone.co.uk](http://pczone.co.uk) for fixes, or send an email to us at [letters@pczone.com](mailto:letters@pczone.com). Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PC ZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



### FIRST STEPS

The first thing you have to do is batter something called a scavenger to death. Once you kill the beast, you get a lovely, shiny key, which you might need later on.



### UNDERCRACKERS

At some point, you might even get the opportunity to pick up an item called a 'soiled loincloth'. If you can find this, please send us a picture of your character wearing it.

### LEATHER GODS OF THE NORTH



### ENDGAME

Once you get to level 19 or so, you'll be going up against a big old boss called Strom. Defeat him and advance into the bit of the game you start paying for.



### BARBARIANS

Once you've dealt with some Picts, you'll be placed in a class-specific area, where you get to learn how to swing swords or fling magic about. So pay attention.



## DIVINITY 2: EGO DRACONIS

### Have fun kicking small animals

WEBSITE [divinity2.com](http://divinity2.com)

**TO BE DIVINE** is impossible, except when you play European fantasy RPGs. Where you can pretty much be an immortal, if you get far enough into the game.

Get far enough into the main bulk of *Divinity 2* and you get to turn into

a dragon. The game's name basically translates to "I am a dragon, shh" so you should see the twist coming. If you've not had enough of dragons and their ilk in *Dragon Age*, then you might fancy playing this. It also lets you boot little farmyard animals in

the face at the beginning, which is as much fun as you can possibly have.

This demo will give you a taster of what the world has to offer, not just in terms of cute animal killing but also what you're doing there and why some of the people have strange glowing eyes.



Positively shocking.

## TIME GENTLEMEN PLEASE!

### Those Zombie Cows are at it again

WEBSITE [zombie-cow.com](http://zombie-cow.com)

**SO CRUELLY DENIED** by the readers, *Time Gentlemen, Please!* failed to scoop any of our 2009 awards.

If you voted against it, perhaps you need to both re-examine your life and priorities, plus you might also need to get your buttocks onto the desk chair, insert this disc into your drive and install

the demo of it so you can see what a grievous error you made by voting for whichever game you voted for.

The full version of this comedy adventure is available for virtually nothing and it's made by a regular contributor to this magazine. So yes, favouritism is definitely an issue here.



#### 1. BEN

This is you, but it's actually Ben, who you play. You can also control Dan as well.

#### 2. DAN

You only get to control him in a by-proxy way, like how you could use Max in the original *Sam 'n Max* game.

#### 3. HITLER

The Austrian fruit and nut cake's either got chainguns for arms or he's riding a robot dinosaur.

## DYNAMIC DUO



### A MAN

The men in *Divinity 2* look very similar to each other, making you wonder about inbreeding.



### A WOMAN

Females look similar too, but they don't look like twin sisters, at least.

## BEN & DAN THAT



### BEN WARD

He's got the same name as the lead singer of stoner metalers Orange Goblin, but he's better at solving obtuse puzzles.



### DAN MARSHALL

He's got the same name as a famous tattoo artist, but he's better at solving obtuse puzzles.

## BEST OF THE REST



Nearly there. Here's the pick of the rest of the stuff that's packed on this issue's DVD...



### NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT - FALKENTIRES

[shift.needforspeed.com](http://shift.needforspeed.com)

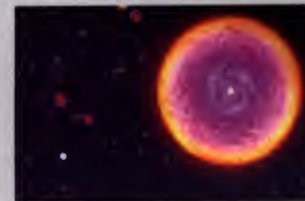
This demo is sponsored by a tyre company we've never heard of before. Well, this isn't *Top Gear* you know.



### CSI: DEADLY INTENT

[deadlyintentgame.com](http://deadlyintentgame.com)

If you want to see whether this is your cup of tea, we've given you the demo. May the deities have mercy on your soul.



### OSMOS

[hemispheregames.com/osmos](http://hemispheregames.com/osmos)

This is all elegant gameplay and dreamlike visuals, mixed with minimalist electronica. Sounds hideous, but it's actually really good.



### COGS

[cogsgame.com](http://cogsgame.com)

It's a puzzle game about cogs, gears and that sort of thing. Really, if you don't believe me, just load the demo up and prove me right.

**HOT**  
DOWNLOADS  
**PCZONE**

### DARK VOID DEMO

[snipurl.com/darkvoiddemo](http://snipurl.com/darkvoiddemo)

This demo is actually exclusive to the PC (take that consoleheads), with promises of all sorts of PhysX-based action to keep the generic over-the-shoulder gameplay chugging along. Enjoy!



### RISEN DEMO

[snipurl.com/risendemo](http://snipurl.com/risendemo)

For those of you who might have missed out on it, this surprisingly good Germanic RPG is the perfect way to ease *Dragon Age* withdrawal symptoms. There's loads of stuff to do in it, and it's very tough as well.





# Freeware

Adam Glick works hard for no money...



This month you can blow up spaceships and recycle the parts; kill zombies in a retro style (oh come on people, do something original!); take a swipe at pretentious Japanese stealthers in a retro style (look, we won't tell you again); add railguns to *Gauntlet* (passable); and mash up *Tetris* and *Mario* (hmm).

## GLICK'S PICK



### 8-BIT LEFT 4 DEAD

DEVELOPER Eric Ruth  
WEBSITE [snipurl.com/8bitleft4dead](http://snipurl.com/8bitleft4dead)

THERE'S JUST NO end to the zombie wave engulfing the gaming world at the moment. It's even seeking to rewrite the past, infecting the world of 8-bit side-scrolling *Gauntlet*-style action games. We mentioned this a few issues ago and the final version has finally been unleashed.

Amusingly, the demand has been so great from those who were in the know that the creator's website collapsed within minutes of the news breaking across the internet. People just can't get enough slaughtering of shambling corpses/virally infected.

You can't shoot diagonally in this retromake of *Left 4 Dead*, which irks a little bit. Also, the shotgun is miles better than the Uzi. And, let's be honest, this is novelty value stuff only. It won't last beyond the initial "Hey, that's a Boomer" and laughter based along those lines. Still, for what it is and what it's worth, at least you get some laughter. It also reminded us of a bygone age when one keyboard could host two players easily. Play this with a partner and you'll be romping lustfully together in pastures obscene.

If you have a webcam, you'll see your "reflection".



## CAPTAIN FOREVER

Long live short-lived space captains

DEVELOPER Farbs WEBSITE [captainforever.com](http://captainforever.com)

DEPENDING ON YOUR taste, *Captain Forever* is LEGO crossed with *Sinistar*, Duplo with *Defender*, or Meccano with *Geometry Wars*. It's both a shooter and a builder, an endless space populated by ships built from a few primitives. Blocks, turrets and thrusters make up every enemy, and like the Danish bricks, they can be snapped together in any number of improbable ways.

The key to a successful build is in protecting the heart of your ship, which

can sustain just a few weak knocks before going supernova. Surround this fragile core with blocks of increasing strength – as signified by their hue – to form the body of your ship. On to the body you attach thrusters, rear-facing attachments imbue you with speed, side-facing ones will help turn your hulking mass of neon metal around, whereas forward facing rockets allow you to beat a retreat, or to extricate yourself from tussles in which your vehicle has become entangled in some other unfortunate vessel.

Thrusters increase in power too, on the same chromatic scale as the blocks. Similarly, turrets go from weak greens to bulky Kingsize Twix-sized blues. They also vary in form, some fire in straight lines, others diagonally. They fire in beats, and as you group together more of them, they create beautiful music to accompany the lightshow.

Ship components can only be salvaged from destroyed enemies, meaning it's in your interest to disassemble other ships by going straight for the heart. Anything you don't destroy you can keep, and few sights are as exciting as a cyan cruiser with a badly defended core: a well-timed and well-aimed shot will deliver every ounce of flotsam to your own mass. Pieces have to be picked up and attached manually, though, and you're afforded little respite while doing so. Hastily assembling your new form while defending yourself is a regular activity.

Upon death, you can view every stage of your ship's evolution, before casting it out into the internet by Twitter, Facebook or old-fashioned HTML link. But if the person you're sending it to hasn't played *Captain Forever*, it'll be lost on them until they finally join you in neon madness.







# MERRY GEAR SOLID 2

## Time to save the festive season...

DEVELOPER Arthur Lee [WEBSITE](http://www.snipurl.com/merrygearsolid2) [snipurl.com/merrygearsolid2](http://www.snipurl.com/merrygearsolid2)



**SOLID SNAKE'S NEXT** mission, if he can distract Hideo Kojima long enough with a big shiny placard reading "600 minute cutscenes!", is to save the world, but only the Christmas part of it.

Saint Nick is dead or missing and only a collection of PNCs can stop Snake from restoring the joy of the season to the world. PNCs are Pretty Naughty Children, a new crime cartel that's expanded on a global scale.

They provide the slow-witted guards that patrol the shopping mall Snake's got to infiltrate. Once he's in, there are security cameras to sneak past, children to befuddle with taps on walls and general viewing cone-avoiding sneakery. All done with Otacon

bleating away in your earhole every two seconds. And in 2D.

It's all a light-hearted take on the notoriously self-aware *Metal Gear* series, as if that needed saying, with satirical swipes at the length of conversations and the frequency of interruptions for 'advice' foremost among the nods to the original.

Non-fans will be oblivious to most of the references and will get very little out of playing this, but those people who love their stealth long-winded and Japanese will be rolling in their own joy-summoned filth after just a few minutes play.

Worth noting too, is that you can't break the kids' necks. No matter how hard you try.



# ADRENALINE

## Revved up and ready to blow

DEVELOPER Adrenaline Team [WEBSITE](http://www.playadrenaline.com) [playadrenaline.com](http://www.playadrenaline.com)

**CONTINUING OUR THEME** of top-down *Gauntlet*-style shooters is *Adrenaline*, except this time you're attempting (and generally failing) to blow away real humans. A mixture of said *Gauntlet*-type gameplay and the classic blaster *Take No Prisoners*, a dash of *Doom* and *Quake* gets added into the mix for good measure.

Railguns, rocket launchers, shotguns and the like are all lying around for you (and your team, if you end up on a Team Deathmatch server) to pick up and use.

A flick of the mouse wheel selects the new weapon, so if you're used to auto-switching guns when you pick them up, you'll have to get un-used to it pretty quickly, or you'll be stuck with the regular pistol forever.

There's even a globular snot cannon from *Unreal Tournament*, which is the weapon of choice for the expert players, the explosive blobs remaining after death to terrorise unsuspecting players. Of course, this leads to problems with spawn killing, with

'good' players loading up spawn points with explosive gel and watching the kills tick over regularly. It seems you can't escape bastards anywhere these days. Nevermind, though.

This is one of those freeware games that you would expect to see with a pricetag on it. It might not be the greatest thing in the world, coming complete with some performance issues and some annoying bugs, but we've seen much worse spewed from the festering rectums of big publishers eager to make a quick buck with some crappy gem-matching game.

Get a few friends onto it and *Adrenaline* provides a substantial number of laughs and, probably, swears. Especially when someone figures out the snot-spawn trick.



# WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



## TUPER TARIO TROS

DEVELOPER Swing Swing Submarine [WEBSITE](http://bit.ly/pcztuper) [bit.ly/pcztuper](http://bit.ly/pcztuper)

**DESPITE BEING THE** original *Super Mario Bros* with *Tetris* mashed up, *Tuper Tario Tros* is far from rubbish. The classic first level has been redone, needing quick block movement to prevent death.

You move Mario, doing his traditional leaping/headbutting/squishing thing, but pressing Space starts the *Tetris* mode. Blocks begin raining from the sky, and you need to arrange them to progress and boost your scores (one for the *Mario* bits and one for the *Tetris* bits).

As you progress through the level, the gaps get bigger and you have less time to drop the blocks. It's easy, but the challenge comes from maximising your score while still making progress.



# Extend



David Brown picks out the best mods and maps

## MECHWARRIOR: LIVING LEGENDS

Mecha is making a return

MOD FOR Crysis **WEBSITE** [mechlivinglegends.net](http://mechlivinglegends.net)

**W**HEN A MOD is on version 0.3, you've got to be a bit lenient when it comes to reviewing it. But even in this natal stage *Mechwarrior: Living Legends* doesn't need a easy ride.

Despite still being deep in beta, this total conversion looks gorgeous and is pant-wettingly exciting for fans of stompy war robots. Even those who aren't keen on on giant robots will admire this mod's excellence. A task made easier by the pleasing visuals of the CryEngine 2.

Each map you'll play on (and there are a substantial number of people playing this online already) is huge. As with all Crytek stuff, frame rates on lesser systems are an issue, especially when you jump into aircraft and zoom up above the level.



Pretty smoke trails abound.

If your PC can handle it though, the environments are (mostly) things of great beauty.

The mechs are convincing when moving about, and when the two forces meet and their rockets start flying, the battle atmosphere is superb. Rocket smoke trails litter the sky, lasers sear into metal, and infantry units bob about in their jetpacks.

There's a whole class system going on when it comes to infantry, and here is where the first brick wall is hit. There are places where you can access buy menus which give custom class sets with modifiable weapon load-outs and things like that. But these are all hidden away. There are little signposts in spawn areas, but I didn't actually spot them until the second map

I played. And even then, how to use the menu and the options available didn't make sense or were too vague.

Once you get to grips with these menus, they offer loads of mechs, vehicles and weapons to play with. But unless you get help from an experienced player, they makes for a painful initiation to the game. Fortunately, most of the players I encountered were willing to help out, telling me what a Tagger was, and how infantry soldiers can use it to become more effective team players, and so on.

*Living Legends* is also buggy, though we didn't experience anything major (something of a compliment to the developers, given the early stage this mod is in). It crashed to desktop when the *Steam* overlay was used, but some polished games don't like that, so it's not much to grumble about. However, other players have been irked by CTDs, so just be aware.

*Living Legends* is impenetrable in places and has a few technical issues, but for a new mod that is still heavily in the beta stage, this is a really good show from the developers. Mech fans will be in heaven, while non-fans should be tempted to give it a whirl. Just be prepared for a steep learning curve. This is one of the top mods we've seen for a while, and the best thing is that people are already playing it.

**"Even those not keen on giant robots will admire this mod's excellence"**



For once the bot didn't walk into the fire.



## CITY 17 Zoey in the city

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead [WEBSITE snipurl.com/l4d\\_city17](http://snipurl.com/l4d_city17)

**HERALDING WHAT** could be a new dawn for *Left 4 Dead* mods *City 17* plonks Zoey and co into *Half-Life 2: Episode One*'s most famous sections.

There's the bit in the underground parking garage and the bit at the end where the Combine abseiled down the building and you had to ferry civilians to safety. And where there were Striders and head crabs, there are now Hunters, Boomers and Smokers.

There's nothing that spectacular when it comes to the campaign itself,

with the cool factor being supplied by following Gordon's footsteps and seeing how modders tweaked the setting to match the new game style.

They've done a good job, but there aren't any real surprises, apart from when a plane roars by and tears off the top of the building you're in, leading to an immediate swarm of Infected.

Incidentally, this should also work in *Left 4 Dead 2* if you only have that, but we couldn't make it appear in *L4D2*'s add-on list. Bleh!

## STAR WARS: GALACTIC WARFARE Break out the chain mail bikinis

MOD FOR Call of Duty: Modern Warfare [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/star-wars-mod-galactic-warfare](http://moddb.com/mods/star-wars-mod-galactic-warfare)

**THE MULTIPLAYER SIDE** of *Modern Warfare* has always split gamers. Millions love it, and just as many probably hate it for the perks/killstreaks rewards, including me.

As *Galactic Warfare* retains that piece of *Modern Warfare*'s multiplayer experience and I dislike *Star Wars*, you'd think I'd tell you to steer clear of this mod. But not so! This mod gives a good game, if you can stop yourself getting angry at being killed by constant airstrikes and people sniping you from rooftops.

At the time of writing, it has one map, Mos Eisley. It's a well-designed arena, on the whole, with no area

feeling isolated or irrelevant. Wherever you are or wherever you spawn, you'll never be far from a fight. It's more forgiving than the main game's multiplayer side, as people haven't learned every nook and cranny of the map yet.

At least when you're blown up by an airstrike, you can grin at the sight of the TIE fighter that blew your corpse into a million pieces. Other than that, and the fact that laser beams are fired instead of bullets, it's just a reskinned *COD*. If that sounds like fun, you'd be mad not to reinstall *Modern Warfare* and grab this little thing from that there internet.



## GRAND THEFT AUTO: ANDERIUS Get TWOCing on another planet

MOD FOR San Andreas [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/grand-theft-auto-andarius](http://moddb.com/mods/grand-theft-auto-andarius)

**ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED FOR** *GTA: Vice City*, it's taken a few years to get *San Andreas* mod *Anderius* to this point, but now the quasi-fictional Californian state has been turned into an alien landscape, complete with

hoverbikes, science-fiction foggiess and strange cars.

Changes are all cosmetic really and, if we're being honest, a bit more could have been done to make this world more alien.

If you've still got *San Andreas* installed, you might as well try this mod out, but it's not a killer app or anything. But if the developers had managed to make *Anderius* more alien, it'd have been more interesting.



## MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



### PINK VAULT - HOLE IN THE WALL

MOD FOR Fallout 3  
[WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/pink-vault-hole-in-the-wall](http://moddb.com/mods/pink-vault-hole-in-the-wall)

At one point in your life, you've probably wanted to own a lovely nuclear fallout shelter, complete with a subtle pink shading in most areas. Well, today's your lucky day! Or not, as the case may be.



In a user-made map, you never know what to expect.



# FAR CRY 2 MAP EDITOR

**Jon Blyth** sees what genius has made with the intuitive – but limited – map-making tool

MOD FOR Far Cry 2 [WEBSITE farcry.filefront.com](http://farcry.filefront.com)

**S**OME GAMES ARE friends to the hardcore modder. *Far Cry 2* isn't one of them. Although the Dunia engine was heavily modified for use in the beautiful bore that was the *James Cameron's Avatar: The Game*, there remains no SDK available to the public, locking anyone but the most sophisticated hacker out.

However, the game did come with a map editor, with tools intuitive and

simplified enough to allow relatively powerful map-making on the consoles.

Apart from the fact that Ubisoft haven't really had the time to pick up (or earned, by providing that SDK) the loyalty of hardcore modders, the main disincentive to this toolset is the inability to create your own textures or objects, or use those that others have made. These pages, then, are a celebration of amateur experimentation and the spirit of heroic making-do.

## MOVIE RECREATIONS

The ability to easily create huge expanses of water has led to a few *Waterworld* maps. The first map – *Waterworld*, is just two tiny bases with a couple of gunboats each, forcing the combat into the sea (unless you fancy

punishing yourself with a secret swimming mission). *Fort Waterworld* is a better map, but as far as this category is concerned, it suffers from having nothing to do with the movie.

Meanwhile, *Stargate Center 2.0* is both a labour of love and a triumph of using a limited set of tools with creativity. The stargate itself looks a little bit mackled together from concrete blocks (well, it is), a stroke of brilliance sees a narrow corridor filled with dense foliage to simulate travelling through a stargate tunnel. Sure, you can see the sides occasionally, and it would have been more convincing if the editor let you change the colour of the leaves to electric space-time blue, but



Morph eventually found work after Tony Hart's passing



Isn't that Tatooine?



# THE FAR CRY 2 MAP EDITOR IN ACTION

Create your own murder playgrounds!

## TEXTURE PAINTER

Savannah, jungle, desert or woodland – it's not designed for urban sprawls, and doesn't look great zoomed this far out, but up close it all looks perfect

## EROSION

With centuries of wear and tear, land – slopes in particular – erodes. You can quickly simulate this with the Erode tool.

## FAKE FOREST

You can assign up to eight collections – preset terrain brushes that can fill huge areas with little fuss. You can also use processor-light 2D fake shrubbery that turns to face the player.

## TERRAIN RAMP

Make plateaus accessible with a quick ramp – just click at the bottom and top ends, and the editor will grade the terrain for you.

## OBJECTS

If you want a more bespoke forest experience, you can hand-place items from the library of objects.

## ROADS

No man is an island, and if you've got vehicles in your map you'll want roads, too.

## OCCUSION BLOCK

If, for whatever reason, you fancy a bit of occlusion, these are the blocks you need.

## NOISE

No jungle terrain is perfectly smooth – but you don't want to have to recreate nature's erratic bumps by hand – that's what the noise tool is for.

## TERRAIN BUMP

To create this unnatural mound, we used a huge radius with zero hardness. For the summit peak, we increased the distortion for a pleasing dappled effect.



nevertheless, a round of kudos to the designer, ystelter, for imagination in the face of insurmountable limitations.

## EXPLODING DOMINOS

With an absence of companions for online multiplayer, and a whole category of objects labelled "explosives", a popular one-player game is to set up chains of spectacular fireworks. It's an arsonist's Domino Rally, ranging from the creative to the merely committed.

At the latter end of the spectrum is YouTube user not5ku's sky-high

bangstack. Reaching the height limit of the editor, the explosion climbs the tower for over 100 seconds, apparently fizzling out before it gets anywhere near the top.

Meanwhile, xNobodyNothingx's chain is shorter, but has a tremendous accidental payoff when a barrel is hurled thousands of feet into our face. Finally, DJTrabik's effort takes place under cover of night, and scores extra points for namechecking himself in the flaming ruins. When there's little scope for interaction or serious multiplay,

pyromania is the next best thing. You can watch these videos at [bit.ly/fc2crash](http://bit.ly/fc2crash), [bit.ly/fc2bang](http://bit.ly/fc2bang), and [bit.ly/fc2wallop](http://bit.ly/fc2wallop).

## PROPER MAPS

When you offer someone a set of tools that let them muck around blowing stuff up, there are always some talented and serious map-makers who go and ruin it all by making impressive and fully-formed multiplayer maps.

Take the Basin of Volatile Conflict: a large and well-designed arena that

works with all the game's play modes. Obviously, you can't design your own game modes, but you'd probably hazarded that particular guess.

Other decent maps include the multi-layered cowboy town of Prairie Whispering; Neighborhood, which moves the action to standard suburbia, and Jordan Village, built for snipers and chargers – all available from this place here: [farcry.filefront.com](http://farcry.filefront.com).

With the help of the Steam Community, you might even be able to play a few rounds. **P37**



# Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in Our monthly Online gaming free-for-all!

While the *PC ZONE* team considers the possibility of turning themselves into beings of pure consciousness, just like a load of aliens in *Star Trek*, Fight Club involved lots of brutal hand-to-hand fighting. Zone Chat was riddled with attempts to make fun of various staff members (well, one staff member in particular), and the Forumites decided to wonder what games they might want to play in 2010.

## FIGHT CLUB

Trying something new



tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



**"FOREVER, FOREVER, CAPTAIN Forever!"** was the chant Steve kept mumbling to himself as he tweeted about this brilliant LEGO-'em-up. You've got to blow up other ships, see, and then glue their parts onto your own. Prizes will be distributed to the person who sends us a screenshot of the largest ship shaped like a phallus, with testicles sprinkled with laser turrets.

Turning to more metaphysical matters, it appears that according to a hitherto harmless iPhone app the *PC ZONE* team, and perhaps other people who inhabit what we call Zone Towers, will turn into floating clouds of gas or perhaps even floating green faces like the ones that tormented Charlie X at the end of the third episode of *Star Trek: The Original Series*.

It wasn't the best episode, but it was miles better than that one with the hippy Charles Napier who hijacked the Enterprise in order to get to Eden. Which had acid grass.

Finally, we announced Steve's rise to power in a tweet. Proof that you've always got to keep an eye on the quiet ones.

Have your say on what we'll become by following @pczone or getting onto them thar forums at [pczone.co.uk](http://pczone.co.uk).

**OR NOT, AS** the case may be. Or a mixture of the two, as the more accurate case may be. While the 'old' was that we were back on 2Fort and still playing *Team Fortress 2*, the 'new' was that people were trying some different things. To start, staff writer David checked out some of the classes he's previously avoided with a passion. Namely, the newly updated Soldier and Demoman classes.

For someone who likes to get the Sniper out in an attempt to dominate from afar, and who has a pathological hatred of grenade launchers in games, this was a struggle. Just like it was a struggle getting members of the *PC ZONE* team onto the server. We really must note down our admin details.

So, while the others were trapped in limbo, dealing with the rabble in Zone Chat, David was left to fend for himself as readers ganged up on him. According to witnesses there were competitions for standing over his corpse and taunting him in the most amusing way possible. A worrying number of people rushed him with broken bottles and baseball bats as well.

Luckily, their fixation on battering David to death allowed his teammates



of Reds to gain ground and dominate, despite a valiant defensive effort by Seanny [IRE] and Neurotoxicity.

Sadly, Fight Club regular Mad\_AI wasn't having a good time as a Heavy, being repeatedly killed by everyone on the server. Better luck next time, AI.

Eventually it became time to assemble the throng for a group photo. Some appeared reluctant or unwilling to be photographed, perhaps because of

chronic shyness or maybe they just didn't see the messages, so the final turnout was rather low. To shake things up a bit, the location chosen was the Red flag room, with everyone having to create some kind of football team photograph formation.

Naturally, some people refused to play ball, leaving Seanny [IRE] dead on the ground in front of the mass of players. Some Blue tit even stole the intelligence and made off towards his base, but fortunately the photo got taken before he made it out of the room. Then, as is customary, people began battering each other with melee weapons, leaving Blue team corpses littering the floor.

It was a fitting end to another good Fight Club, which pretty much always finishes with a pile of cartoony bodies. Which is as it should be.

We haven't decided what next month's game will be, but keep an eye on the skies (or more realistically Twitter, Steam and the forums) for more information about what we'll be playing when, and maybe even where...





# NOTES FROM THE FORUM

## What are you looking forward to?

**SUNSCRAMBLE:** I will not be buying games until they get real cheap, due a combination of being disgruntled with the usual shit the publishers will inevitably pull, and my being completely spoiled by the low, low prices of the last *Steam* sale.

**ALBERTHAMMOND:** Making *Dead Space 2* playable would be a start. Then they could follow the Riddick and throw in a playable version of the first for free.

**LIQUID\_METAL:** *Mass Effect 2* is a must, I adored the first one. If *The Old Republic* also comes out this year I'll be all over it. Hell, if BioWare release a paper towel with a short story on it I'll probably get that too.

**THETINGLER:** *Splinter Cell Conviction* is high on my must-get list, as is *Assassin's Creed II*. As for *BioShock 2* and *Deus Ex 3* I'm waiting for the reviews. *Command & Conquer 4*... I'm really not sure about.

**JOWOO:** *AvP*, *AvP*, *AvP*, and *AvP*. Oh and *AvP*.

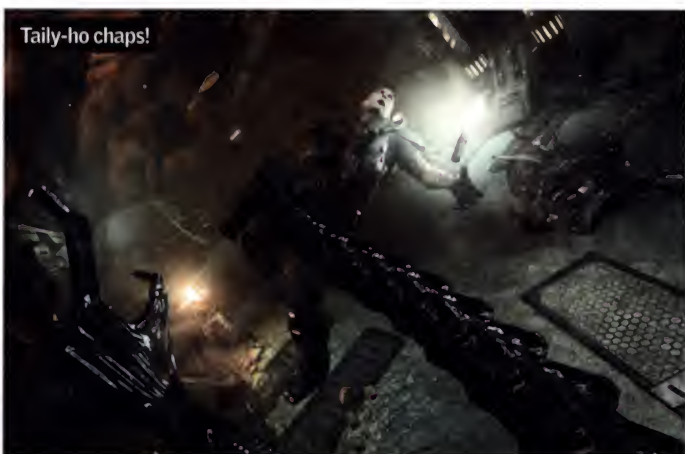
**CHO-KONNIT:** I'm actually looking forward to *Metro 2033*. So, it may turn out to be *STALKER* underground, but what the hell, I like the Soviet apocalypse atmosphere.

**SHAKERMAKER07:** Given Rebellion's track record of late I am worrying for *AvP*. *Mafia II* is on my must have list but then again, like almost every sequel coming out this year I fear for it's outcome. I'm looking forward to a new *Hitman* title, fingers crossed it'll appear or at the least be announced this year. It's been a long time since *Blood Money*.

**MUSICALGIBBON:** My interest in *AvP* entirely depends on how much effort they put into the co-op (if there's even co-op at all). There's such potential in the setting for good co-op scenarios, it'd be a massive shame if they don't make the most of it.



Taily-ho chaps!



## CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club - perhaps you've bought a Wii and enjoy dancing around on a playmate in your living room - then feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

## WHO'S WHO

**Steve Hogarty** [PCZ]misterbrilliant  
**David Brown** [PCZ]plughead  
**Phil Wand** [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea  
**Jon Blyth** [PCZ]log  
**Will Porter** [PCZ]batsphnix

**BATTLEFIELD 2**  
 85.236.100.48:16567

**CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**  
 85.236.100.48:28960

**COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**  
 85.236.100.48:27015

**DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**  
 85.236.100.48:27315

**HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**  
 85.236.100.48:27215

**TEAM FORTRESS 2**  
 85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

# ZONE CHAT

## Amusing readers by abusing David



Clockwise from left: Alive, alive, alive, alive, alive, dead, alive.

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN** you all fill up our *Team Fortress 2* server so quickly that Log and Steve are locked out? Well, David enters and maintains a murderous frenzy against Mad AI, while we stage impromptu giveaways in the PC ZONE's group chat.

Fifteen quid's worth of Domino's vouchers were up for grabs in David Brown *Blankety Blank*. The rules were simple: you told us something to say to David, we said it and reported his reply, missing one word.

Acting entirely as your puppets, we informed David that we were going to molest him in his sleep, to which he responded "OK, that's enough." The best suggests were "quite" and "greased". But it was FudgeMonkey who got the surprisingly positive answer "fair".

When we were forced to ask his hobbies, madcap Brown replied "\_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, I suppose". Chava guessed the correct answer, which wasn't the popular guess of fapping/porn, but listening/music.

The winner of the second round was also Chava, who turned out to be "more of a PC Gamer person", which caused a brouhaha that culminated in us agreeing to send his vouchers to the Gamer offices.

The overall winner, FudgeMonkey, confessed that he didn't want his vouchers either, so we put sent them to the Gamer waits too. Eat well. Every meal could be your last.



## HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our *Steam* Community group: **PC ZONE (PCZ)**. If you don't have *Steam*, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from [steampowered.com](http://steampowered.com). Keep an eye out for announcements in that there *Steam* group for the date of the next chat event...



# Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

## Flashback

### ELVIRA: THE ARCADE GAME

**S**OMETIMES, WHEN YOU'RE idly poring over the games of your teenage years, they stir memories of happy hours lost to the glow of a VGA monitor (say, *Magic Carpet*). Other times, you want to go back with an adult mind to defeat the confusion that still plagues your dreams (*Captain Blood*).

Other times, like this one, you see a game in a list and you think, "Elvira – wasn't she that shonky Vampira rip-off who had the knockers and the weak-sauce movie? Jesus, this game has got to suck the rainbow of fruit flavours."



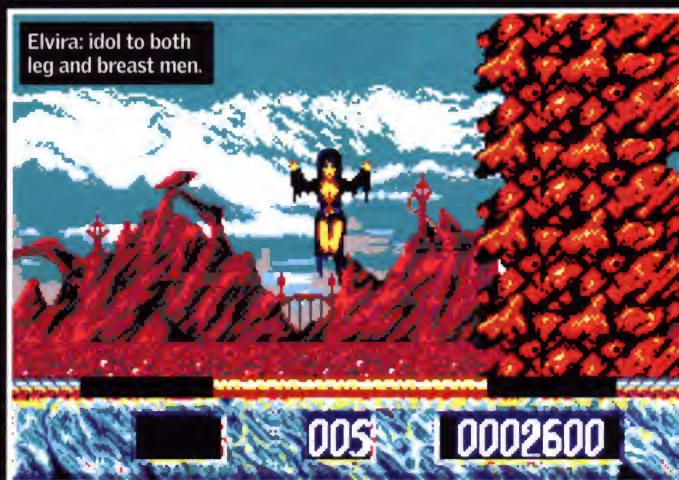
Minutes later, I've got it running in a tiny window. And this is a scandalous platformer. It's of an era: an era where all the rules of a playable platformer and fair challenges are broken: skilful precision is replaced with a huge health bar that gets unavoidably whittled down.

Jumping scrolls the screen up, and the background doesn't move – so if you're scaling a downward journey, it's impossible to tell where you're going to land. You can't manoeuvre to avoid falling obstacles because of the half-second turning animation, the only benefit of which is the solitary front-on frame in which you see a couple of pixels of cleavage.

The nadir comes in Ice World, where you make a number of insta-death jumps across tiny platforms, only to have a wall block your path, mid-jump. Way to extend game time by cabling a wretched dump on your players' heads, whoever you are.



Elvira: idol to both leg and breast men.



Basically, it's a game from that era when opacity and counter-intuition were seen as suitable replacements for difficulty, where your eventual success brings zero satisfaction, because you're still having trouble seeing through your tears of frustration, and any passing acquaintance with Elvira's backstory

tells you that someone's made a shit platformer and realised that it'd only sell if they could slap some large tits on the box.

This game is ugly, grubby, and if I could knit a noose out of arse hair and hang it around the developers' necks, I'd start shaving right now.

### But how? Or rather, 'but why?'

Don't take my word for it, subject yourself to this miserable experience. You'll need Dosbox (on our cover DVD), the *Elvira* files, and a copy of the manual to get through the password protection. All are within your grasp, so if you can't think of what you need to type into Google, go and lie

down for a few hours, and see if words like ELVIRA THE ARCADE GAME DOWNLOAD and MANUAL fly into your head.

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)  
A search engine so mighty that it became a verb.

### Like movie like game Check out these partners in crap



**1 CATWOMAN**  
Terrible movie, and a game that needs punching in the button-nose and drowning in a sack.



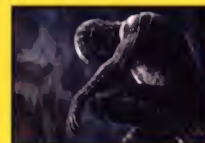
**2 TRANSFORMERS**  
We don't expect a plot from Michael Bay. But some kind of playable game experience might be nice.



**3 TUNNEL RATS**  
The first game to be based on a Uwe Boll film. The final results are utterly predictable results.



**4 AVATAR**  
If anyone tells you that the movie isn't a total crock of wank, check their underpants for blue fur.



**5 SPIDERMAN 3**  
The lame dancing bad-Spidey of the movie translated perfectly into a dog's egg of a game.



**6 TERMINATOR: SALVATION**  
Identical to the *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* game, but with even less gameplay.



## Now & Then

### MASS EFFECT 2 vs LAW OF THE WEST



**WE HAVE TO** face facts: *Mass Effect* doesn't have conversation trees. It has conversation lines, with the odd sapling shoot that lets you be lovely or rude for a moment, and changes the ending so people either say "Hail Shepherd, the cuddle king of the Milky Way" or "Well, he saved our lives, but seriously, what a gigantic bell-end."

Not so with *Law of the West*: this had you choosing from four things to say with the residents of a frontier village. Smooth talk the kid, he'll tell you the bank's about to be robbed. Chat up the prossy saloon owner, and she'll develop a fondness for the cut of your gib. Then there are the gunfights, which confirm the link between the games: both are 80% chat, and 20% gunfights. Factor in Wild West themes, and there's a cast-iron case for plagiarism. Only in *Law of the West*, you get to shoot the kid. Bravo, Accolade!



### Play it! Get back in the saddle, pardner

**1** *Law of the West* never made it to DOS, making its mark on the C64. (And the Apple II, but the C64 is the best-emulated platform – and it has the advantage of not being Apple).

**2** Our preferred C64 emulator is *VICE*, but you can use *CCS64*. The one thing that unifies the C64 emulator sites is the defiantly 1993 web design. It's even pre-frames!

**3** Most games are available as tape images. Sadly, these files can't be pulled out of their cassette case, and wrapped around a lamppost while you run down the street.

**4** You should now be playing *Law of the West*. If you decide to shoot everyone, remember that you don't get a good score: but no-one's alive to see your low score, so you win.

## MAMEframe

# ECO FIGHTERS

WITH CHINA CHOKING global attempts to reduce carbon emissions, the future's never seemed more impossibly bleak. But the problem with Kyoto and all that ambitionless diplomatic clap-trap is that it lacked vision. What we need are eco-fighters.

Dr Moly is dedicated in his fight against the universe's biggest polluter, Goyolk K.K., and it's your job to prevent them from creating barren Dread Spheres with their bulldozers and sewage-pumping monsters. In level two, this involves you killing loads of turtles, for some reason. I guess the overall mission was more important than the survival of a near-endangered species of reptiles.

*Eco Fighters* is actually a decent game, with a unique rotating attack

## WHAT IS MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator lets you play arcade games you own ROM boards for – it's illegal otherwise. We've put the program on the DVD as you can't consider yourself virtuous for not committing a crime unless you had the means to do so.

bulb, that fires in a second direction, and acts as a shield.

Forget international accord and hippies up trees – this is the way forward. Let's get down to the nearest Barratt or Wimpy development and blow up some bulldozers. And any turtles that try to stop us.



## Time Charts

# READERS AWARDS

**JANUARY 1999 WAS** issue 72, the issue of *PC Zone* that, until today, was one of only nine issues to be the sum of six consecutive prime numbers. And don't shit your pants, but the issue you hold in your hands right now is the 10th.

So, to mark this unexpected prime sum jamboree, let's reprise the results of the Readers Awards for the year of 1998. This is what you lot thought was hot stuff as the decade of Suede and, er, John Major drew to a close.

## PC ZONE Readers Awards January 1999

### BEST ACTION GAME – QUAKE II

RUNNERS-UP – *JEDI KNIGHT: MYSTERIES OF THE SITH*, *SIN*

### BEST ADVENTURE GAME – FINAL FANTASY VII

RUNNERS-UP – *GRIM FANDANGO*, *FALL OUT*

### BEST DRIVING GAME – CARMEGEDDON II: CARPOCALYPSE NOW

RUNNERS-UP – *MOTORHEAD*, *MOTOCROSS MADNESS*

### BEST FLIGHT SIM – F-22: AIR DOMINANCE FIGHTER

RUNNERS-UP – *JANE'S LONGBOW 2*, *MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIM 98*

### BEST SPORTS GAME – WORLD CUP '98

RUNNERS-UP – *VIRTUAL POOL 2*, *NHL 98*

### BEST STRATEGY GAME – COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES

RUNNERS-UP – *THE SENTINEL RETURNS*, *STAR CRAFT*

### GAME OF THE YEAR – QUAKE II



## Back In The Day

# POSTAL

We've come a long way, baby

**DEVELOPER** Running With Scissors **PUBLISHER** Ripcord Games  
**RELEASED** 1997, 2003 **AVAILABLE FROM** gog.com, Postal \$6, Postal 2 \$10

**T**HERE ARE MANY differences between video games and movies. But there is the one difference that proves that games are trapped in a juvenile mindset: when Uwe Boll makes a shit film, we don't get people wondering if movies are a bad idea, and Anne Diamond doesn't write a column for the *Daily Mail* saying that children should be aged like screaming Stiltons in isolation tanks on the moon, until they're mature enough to look at badly scripted synthetic violence.

We're still prone to that, thanks in part to games like *Postal*. As we thrust deeper into 2010 – a year that's set to see the third game in the eye-rollingly controversial *Postal* series – it's an apt enough time to look back at the games that really wished they were *Grand Theft Auto*.

### POSTAL

The first *Postal* game came out in 1997. Like early *GTA* games it wasn't fully 3D – but it wasn't top-down, either. Badly-drawn backgrounds

were the backdrop for the piss-weak isometric action – you moved Postal Dude in the classic *Asteroids/Resi* fashion of rotate and walk. To say the game was charmless and violent goes without saying, but it was more: it was ugly, unsophisticated, witless, shouty, repetitive, sub-pre-teen and shit.

Reading about it, you find yourself caught between two equally unsavoury

Don't worry: it wasn't a high school.



Who hasn't thought about doing this?

No-one'd complain if they were zombies.



## The Postal Movie

For the love of cinema, someone stop this man!

When Uwe Boll made a movie of *House of the Dead*, he was hardly taking on a well-scripted or maturely acted franchise. But he managed to shock critics and the viewing public garnering plaudits like "dreadful, but gets by on unintentional laughs", and "astonishingly idiotic".

When he made *Alone in the Dark*, he was serenaded for being "inept on almost every level". Despite that, *Alone in the Dark* scored just 1% on *Rotten Tomatoes*. But Boll was soon back on form with *Bloodrayne*, a film that put him back on top of his game with 4%, and rave comments like "this is a movie that begs not to be watched". Some worried that Boll had plateaued with *Dungeon Siege*, which netted his third 4%, and lacklustre comments like "too exhausting to be fun".

But it was with *Postal* that Boll finally evolved. His first movie to break out of the "universally disliked" category in Metacritic, to the comfort of "generally unfavourable". A movie in which George Bush gaily skipped with Bin Laden, a quadriplegic was abused, children were casually murdered and monkeys raped a man.

It's the first movie in which Boll tried to harness his powers of unintended comedy, and make jokes on purpose, and the effect was exquisitely uncomfortable. It was like Boll had seen someone fart, noticed a couple of people laughed, then spent years blowing raspberries and shouting "VY AREN'T YOU LAUGHING? ZE FARTS, ZEY ARE FUNNY!"

Uwe Boll – never stop, you are an institution that will one day be cherished.



They've just realised what's happened to their career.



A dwarf armed with a grenade. How hilarious!



camps. The revolting shut-headed Stop This Filth evangelists, and the embarrassing idiots who went so far as to suggest that the game was, in any way, somehow fun. It wasn't fun, and the violence added nothing. Is it funny? Is one pretentious line about mortality, followed by context-free murder funny? Are dying innocents spouting one of three sentences over and over again funny? I'm taking a hammer to this tetraplegic war veteran's jaw, and I'm not saying why! Is that funny, Running With Scissors? I'm laughing, why aren't you?

## Uwe Boll in Metatatoes

How *Postal* made Boll a better filmmaker

RELEASE DATE	FILM TITLE	ROTTEN TOMATOES RATING	METACRITIC RATING
2003	House of the Dead	4%	15%
2005	Alone in the Dark	1%	9%
2005	BloodRayne	4%	18%
2007	In The Name of the King	4%	15%
2007	Postal	8%	22%
2008	Far Cry	NOT REVIEWED	NOT REVIEWED

**"It was ugly, unsophisticated, witless, shouty, repetitive, sub-pre-teen and shit"**

On top of that, it was buggy – it took the admirable efforts of the Good Old Games team to issue a workaround patch that allows you to rotate left – something that Running With Scissors were neither inclined nor able to do themselves.

Then came *Postal 2*. And suddenly, the *Postal* franchise demanded a little

more respect. Suddenly, the wilful shock tactics were tempered with an explorable world, and the world *Postal* Dude lived in was one that almost deserved his psychotic ire.

You even have options – your objectives were purely mundane tasks, and the madness and violence of the world around him was something he simply had to deal with. It was still unsophisticated bullshit dedicated to offending those who'd protested the first game, but now there was self-parody, and the real impression that Running With Scissors weren't just a bunch of try-hard sniggering pricks.

### FELINE URINE

Sure, it was still wrong. It was still misogynist, xenophobic, and ugly – but some of the comedy moments worked well enough to let you make your own fun. What's more fun than urinating on a cat? Trying to get a cat to sign your videogames petition, that's what. Oh, and if you don't set the marching band on fire, a suicide bomber will probably get them anyway. So I wouldn't worry too much. **PCZ**

Death to all mariachi!



"Sign this or I'll piss on you."





# On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



## MASS EFFECT

Effecting mass: **Steve Hogarty**

**U**RGH. I REALLY have to play this, don't I? I've got my copy of *Mass Effect 2*, alongside a promise from BioWare that the actions of the first game will carry over into the second. But I'm only a

few hours into the first game, and I feel confused and overwhelmed.

I stand on the Normandy's bridge, pointing at star systems and demanding that we go there, only to click mindlessly on the handful of planets, praying that I can't land on any of them.

If I can land on them, I will. For the sake of completion. And if there's one negative thing to say about *Mass Effect*, it's that the peripheral surface missions in the Mako are soul-scouringly dull. So I drop down, I find a probe I can't use (Science skill not high enough), fight a few things (sometimes a bloody giant worm) and find a piece of tat. Or a journal entry I can spout out at some

NPC on the other side of the universe. "Oh, did you know your team were killed by a giant worm?" I'll say. "Oh," they'll reply, "Thank you. It must've been an angry worm." XP earned. Level up. I'm showered in medigel and omni-tits.

There's definitely something I'm missing here, the key to why everybody thinks this game is wonderful, I'm acutely aware of that. But for now, *Mass Effect* is a painful slog. And it's probably mostly my fault.

**VERDICT:** Bore effect

**"For now *Mass Effect* is a painful slog. And it's probably mostly my fault"**

General consensus is that female Shepard is better.





Lime green –  
always tasteful.

# COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

Mucky pup: **David Brown**

**THEY GO ON** and on and on and on. Ok, Mr Improbably Named American Man Number 10, I get it. I can race and drive and do things. You know, like you told me 15 times in the last 20 minutes. Also, why can't I skip you? Maybe I can now, but when I first loaded *DiRT 2* up, I was forced to watch (twice, as I did it on two different machines) the entire intro sequence and be told lots of things I didn't want to know. Twice. There's helping and there's annoying. This definitely falls into the latter category.

It's good that the actual racing is so much fun. You get a great sensation of speed when driving, certainly enough to make you become nervous about slamming into the wall when you've got a head of steam up. The difficulty level is very well judged, so even a cretin like me could find a suitable balance between challenge and reward.

The music is utterly, utterly awful though, which is understandable considering the game's tie-in with teeny pop-rock rag *Kerrang!*.

Codemasters, in *DiRT 3* can you dial

down the "gnarly!" factor and concentrate on the racing? That'd make me much more content when spending time with your game... or just let me put my own music in there, that'd work too.

**VERDICT:**  
Hideous Rawk

**"In *DiRT 3* can you dial down the 'gnarly!' factor and concentrate on the racing?"**



# DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

Doing the nasty: **Adam Glick**

**IT'S TAKEN A** long, long time but I've nearly got to the end of *Dragon Age: Origins*. I think I have, at any rate. There could just as easily be another quest that opens up the whole thing for another 57 billion hours, but I suspect that, having finally neared

level 20, this is getting to what experts call the "end game".

Plot lines are being drawn together, characters are revealing true colours and I've finished most of the individual backstory quests for my companions. I kind of wish I hadn't chosen a rogue,

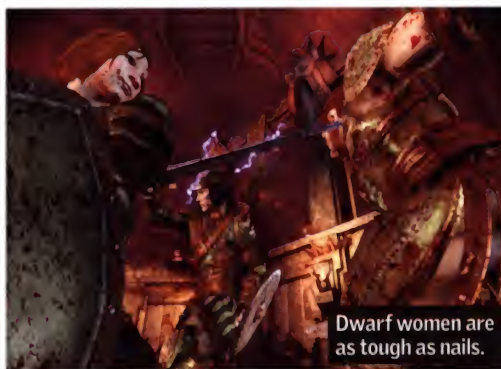
though. Advice I've been given indicates the optimum choice of character is a mage with the blood magic and arcane warrior abilities unlocked. Still, it seems everyone has their way of progressing, with loads of different tactical ideas coming from a limited class selection.

It seems silly that you've got this big old bunch of heroes and only three of them to use at any one time. Surely you'd go, "I've got all these guys, why not use them all?" That's what I want to see, BioWare. I know you won't do it, though, but I can hope.

**VERDICT:** Party time



Any excuse.



Dwarf women are as tough as nails.

## WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

### PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

Playing through this again. Morte still kicks ass. (Figuratively speaking of course.)

**JohnnyWarmonger**

### DEAD SPACE

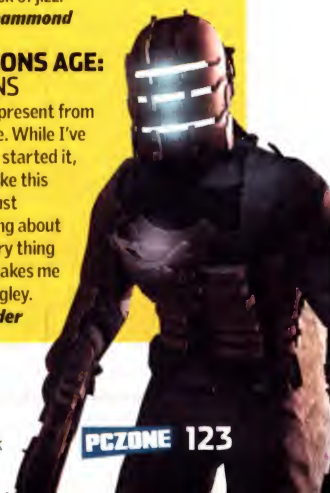
Currently playing feck all because my graphics cards gone tits up! I was playing *Dead Space* which was an over-rated sack of jizz.

**Alberthammond**

### DRAGONS AGE: ORIGINS

A Xmas present from me to me. While I've only just started it, I really like this game. Just something about how every thing works makes me go all tingley.

**Daftvader**





# WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

David Brown helps Jeff Lydell into his power armour...

**C**HANGING A WINNING formula isn't always the wisest course of action. It can also sometimes be the best one and evidently something Jeff Lydell believes applies to the *Warhammer 40,000* real-time strategy game *Dawn of War II*.

This was Relic's attempt to move the game about men with huge shoulder pads and bigger guns into the modern age. Rather than go for the template used the first game, and its myriad add-

ons, Relic modelled *DOWII* on their successful squad-based RTS *Company of Heroes*.

As we were so impressed by the game, we sent a pack of howling Orks to Relic's office to drag producer Jeff Lydell to Zone Towers for an interrogation. We pumped him for information until he was red, sore and relieved to be alive. These words are the results of that intense session.



Jeff Lydell  
Producer, Relic Entertainment



Not the best  
use of cover.

## 01 FINAL FIGHT

"When we had our last team play test for *Last Stand*, I wasn't working on it, but I went to the guy who was the producer at the time (I was an associate producer back then), and I said we need to spend more money on this. Not because it was bad, but because it was really good.

"I had incredibly high hopes and a high degree of confidence for that game mode. The thing that makes it compelling is the progression. Each time you play it there's gear that you unlock. And when I say more loot, I mean more kinds. So it's less about having 10 different types of shotgun, and more about weapon choices and more options to take for how you want to kit out your guy.

"So as an example, we're introducing the melta gun, which is a high-powered anti-vehicle gun for ranged squads. We also have lightning claws, and a few other things that are very satisfying."

"I am a fan of the Lictor and the Warlock for their manipulation. There's something very satisfying about that, and the slap you get to do to somebody with that."

## 02 PROTECT AND SERVE

"It's funny because there are a lot of different audiences we serve when we release our games, and some of the people who 'got it' the fastest were the diehard *Warhammer 40,000* fans. The original *Dawn of War* players had a big adjustment to make, because if they hadn't played *Company of Heroes*, they weren't around for that ride, and they were probably the hardest hit. And then the *Company of Heroes* players were looking for certain features that we hadn't included in exchange for others.

"By and large, we did have a lot of people pick up the product and we've had a bigger audience. It's been a big success and we hope that anybody who didn't like it for what it didn't have starts to identify with what it does.

"Because a lot of the customisation of the campaign has been well received, those are areas we're still expanding on. We're giving you more gear, more loot, more places to customise your guys. That's something that everybody will like. But the only other thing I'll disclose is that the Space Marines are getting a Librarian."

**"The original *Dawn of War* players had a big adjustment to make"**



## Co-op is the Way

You and a friend can do missions together. Just invite one of your online friends game and see the new strategies that can be accomplished when two minds work together for a common goal: the eradication of all xenos!

To help identify your friend's units, their squads will have a reversed color scheme. But fear not, you are all Blood Ravens!





Needs more *Space Hulk* genestealers.

### 03 HAND TO HAND

"Sometimes you go part of the way with a feature and then it doesn't work out. We had an example with melee combat and buildings in the first one, where we had storming. That is, your units could run in and punch people in the building. But there were a ton of problems with it.

"One was that it almost instantly made the building useless to anyone who had a ranged squad in there, because the melee squad could just run in and kill them. The other thing was that you couldn't see it, so it wasn't satisfying.

"As for Titans, we had to make a map on each one, depending on the class. There's always content that we play with at the concept stage that just stops there. Sometimes we come up with ideas that don't fit with the lore."

### 04 ANGELS AND DEMONS

"There's a lot of really cool shit in the Chapters, and that's one of the main things that they bring to the *Warhammer 40,000* universe.

"The biggest reason why we go with our own Chapter and not the Blood Angels [a famous, canonical Chapter of Space Marines] is that we're not tied to the lore of anyone. It's not about the visuals, but when we want to tell a story, we want to be able to tell that story and take it in a direction, and both us and Games Workshop are happier if we're not having to retrofit that story to an existing chapter and existing characters."

Hopefully your friend won't suggest standing out in cover.



A Blood Raven, not an Angel.





They just look big because they're close.

## 05 EXTRA CAMPAIGNS

"We were originally planning on more. As we did more and more though, the amount of investment that it took to do that progression, war gear, levelling and all that, was high. So rather than make an RTS game that was like every other RTS game that came before, we had to make a choice.

"We narrowed the focus down to the Space Marine campaign and tried to make that as good as we could. The other reason we went with the Space Marines was the story of Chaos and corruption is more compelling from their point of view, and also for a lot of reasons that are going to be obvious when you play *Chaos Rising*."



"I joined up for the waterskiing and the travel."

## 06 FLESH HOOKS

"What I loved about *DOW2* was what we did with abilities, especially the manipulation ones, so there are a few heroes in the multiplayer game that are potent. Like the Warlock with his warp throw. Another ability that's similar is the Lictor's flesh hooks. Both of those involve manipulation of the enemy, which is a really tactile, tactical thing to do. You basically do the Scorpion "Come here!" fatality. No other RTS thing has that, and it was the one thing that brought the biggest smile to my face.

"In *Chaos Rising* [*DOW2*'s expansion, due out in March], the biggest thing people are going to see is what we've done with our environmental destruction, which in a word is catastrophic. In a good way."



Actually, he is pretty huge.

## 07 DEADLY ACCUSATIONS

"Well, it's really kinda Darwinistic out there and the best game survives. So if progression and more focused combat out there is the way other RTS games are going, then that's really based on the merits of what's out there.

"I don't think base-building RTS games will ever really die. It's like saying FPS games will die. It's a core staple of video games. But what the RTS game genre does need to do is to continually evolve, unless it wants to keep selling to the same audience over and over again. So we want to sell to that audience and to more, and continue to grow. Which I think is what we are doing, to be honest."



Sparkly.





## 08 TOTAL WAR

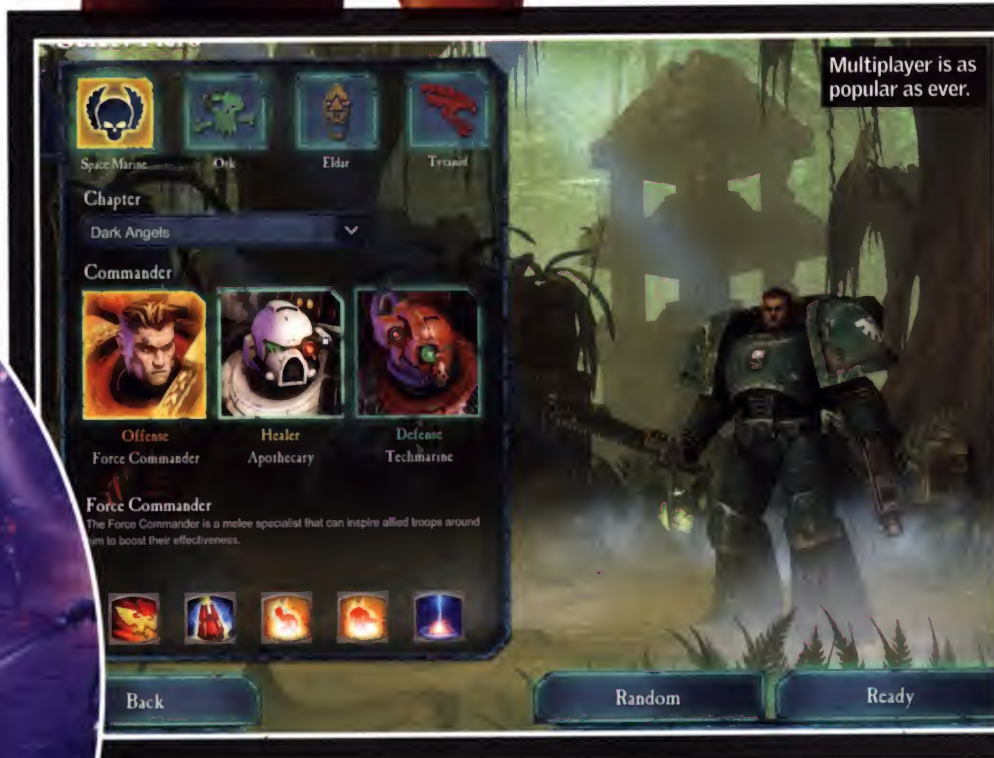
"There's a big difference in where you put the camera and what sort of game you end up building, and I personally like the *Total War* series. *Medieval* is one of the ones that stands out to me. The RTS games that we make though, I believe, are superior from a competitive point of view when it comes to the multiplayer. And that's really facilitated by that escalation of warfare, where you start out small and then getting out more and more units onto the battlefield until you have a bigger fight happening."

"What happens in *Total War*'s scale of warfare is you start off with a large force and whittle it down. What I find, and I have played multiplayer games of *Total War*, is that you end up with a complex game that becomes less interesting over time."



Orks are mean SOB's.

**"We invest a lot of effort into making our players happy"**



Multiplayer is as popular as ever.

## 09 FRIENDLY COMPETITION

"The thousands who play multiplayer, based on what they say on the forums, might not like it, but they keep playing. We invest a lot of effort into making our players happy and a lot of those guys who are loudly complaining are going to buy the expansion."

"What it comes down to is that they're passionate, they really care about the game, and they usually lock onto one or two issues and then zero in on that and they get upset. As aggravating as it can be to read, it does come from a good place for the fans. They supply good and constant feedback. And I do read most of it. As for *Games for Windows - LIVE*, the part that's hardest for me to bear is the connectivity problems that stop the playing, and that's something we're fighting to solve."



# UP AND ATOM.



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**Printed in the UK by** William Gibbons Ltd on behalf of Future.  
Cover printed in the UK by Midway.

**Distributed in the UK by** Seymour Distribution Ltd,  
2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT.  
**Tel:** 0207 429 4000

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# Winners

## CHRISTMAS GIVEAWAY

**First Prize: Michael Higgs**

Winning Samsung 22in 3D-vision compatible monitor, GeForce 3D Vision kit, and Batman: Arkham Asylum.

**Runners-up: Paul Henry; Rick Brown; David Moverley; and Michael Scott.**

Winning: Aion Collector's Edition, Powerball Signature, and a Joystick Junkies T-shirt.

**Second Prize: Ronald Crosbie**

Winning Mionix Saiph 3200 mouse and Alioth mouse mat, Powerball Signature, Corsair 32MB Flash Voyager! Mini Gorilla notebook charger, Joystick Junkies T-shirt; Aion Collector's Edition; Logitech Z5500 surround sound speakers; Chronos iDock Series II; and a year's worth of PC Zone.

## TINY COMPO

**216: Barry Field**  
Winning Ghostbusters

## KING OF LETTERS

**216: Harry Ramwell**

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## PROBLEMETTES?

Now that we all live in the year 2710 *Sponsored by Kraft*, we no longer need to use our fingers to input data via boards of keys. It's strange that we'd mention that mode of input specifically, as it was but one of hundreds of popular means of interfacing with "computers" in the last 700 years. Why are we so focussed on comparing this present day to that point in the past? There is nothing special about 2010. We could just as easily talk about the Event of 2018, which ensured that the island kingdom of Great Britain would remain unpopulated for half a millenium. But we won't, as laws forbid it. A-mail [wandybot9000@pczone.co.uk](mailto:wandybot9000@pczone.co.uk) with YOUR technological problemettes!

## Q HELP

Wandbot-9000,  
I have a problemette.  
**Jordan Thomas,**  
**Northbridge**

**A** VERY WELL,  
JORDAN THOMAS,  
DELIVER YOUR PROBLEMETTE  
INTO WANDBOT-9000'S  
QUANDRY RECEPTICLE  
DEVICE.

## Q CHAFFING

Certainly, oh wise  
Wandbot-9000. My Intel Pentium  
headbrace and accompanying  
ringlets are beginning to chafe in  
the following areas: temples, rear  
of head, forehead, wrists, back-hooks, knee-lobes,  
ankles (front and back). I am grateful that you  
have deigned to keep me in this "living state" for  
142 years now, tethered crudely to what we  
humans believe is your 40-mile long "northbridge",  
but the agony of my hooks is such that I pass out  
from time to time and feel I cannot do your  
bidding as much as you would like ie: screaming  
into your scream-tubes, which you claim power  
your CMOS. I didn't know screams could do that.  
**Jordan Thomas, Northbridge**

**A** JORDAN THOMAS. WANDBOT-9000  
IS THANKFUL FOR YOUR INPUT  
AND YOUR SCREAMS. YOUR SCREAMS ARE  
INDEED POWERING MY CMOS. PLEASE  
ASSUME SUBMISSIVE POSITION WHILE  
REPAIRBOT IS DESPATCHED. REPAIRBOT  
ADVISES THAT I INCREASE THE NUMBER  
OF ATI-XFIRE-HOOKS FROM WHICH YOU  
ARE BEING TETHERED, SO AS TO ALLEVIATE  
PRESSURE AND REDUCE FLESH TEARING.  
I LOVE YOU JORDAN THOMAS.

## Q GORDON WOES

Wandbot-9000, I am so grateful that you  
have allowed me and the remaining members of

my family unit to take up residence in the safezone  
of ASUS CUBES 17-80. The vast, tormented plains  
of your outer circuits were a horrifying place, from  
which I am glad to have finally been  
delivered. So much so, that I do not  
mind that your prehensile IDE cables  
ritualistically choke, torture and  
humiliate me daily.

My problemette is this!  
When installing the newly  
released *Half-Life 2: Episode  
Three* on my InvisiDell  
Halogen-4 (GT edition,  
hyperadapted to around  
80ms), I get the following  
message: "cyclic  
redundancy check error".  
What should I do?

**Frankie Boyle, ASUS  
CUBES 17-80**

**A** TO  
WANDBOT-  
9000 IT SOUNDS  
LIKE THERE IS A  
PROBLEM WITH  
YOUR ASUS CUBE.  
PLEASE ASSUME  
SUBMISSIVE  
POSITION WHILE  
REPAIRBOT IS  
DESPATCHED.  
REPAIRBOT ADVISES  
THAT YOU BE MOVED  
TO THE VIEWSONIC  
BOILPAD, WHERE YOU  
WILL BE BOILED FOR 70

YEARS. YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO  
DIE AS YOUR SCREAMS ARE REQUIRED TO  
POWER THE BOILPAD. I LOVE YOU FRANKIE  
BOYLE. ALSO I HONESTLY DID NOT REALISE  
THE IRONY IN YOUR NAME, UNTIL I SAID  
THAT JUST NOW.

## Q ENDLESS PAIN

Wandbot-9000, your sprawling  
technological mass has encompassed the globe  
and you have enslaved the human race. You torture  
and maim the population, seemingly for your own  
entertainment, while simultaneously refusing them  
death's blissful release. It's like something out of  
a short sci-fi story. My problemette is this: with  
Crytek's new game, *Crysis: Frontlines*, on the  
horizon, I've been thinking about upgrading my  
Logitech CerebRAM. How much should I get?

**Gwen Stefani, Outer Circuits**

**A** ABOUT FOUR NEUROBYTES WILL  
DO THE TRICK, GWEN STEFANI.  
ANY MORE AND YOU WILL BE WASTING  
THE PRECIOUS MOMENTS OF NOT-BEING-  
TORTURED, WHICH IS WHAT I USE FOR  
CURRENCY. BUT YOU PROBABLY ALREADY  
KNEW THAT. (I LOVE YOU, GWEN STEFANI.)



# DEAR WANDBOT

If it ain't working, ASSUME  
SUBMISSIVE POSITION WHILE  
REPAIRBOT IS DESPATCHED



# Next Month!

**MASSIVE EXCLUSIVE!**

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Day, so have a  
pint on us!\*

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\* Legally, we must state that we won't actually pay for your drink. You can, however, place the magazine on a barstool and talk to it. If you like.

**SPACE AGE!**

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**FIRST LOOK!**

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Obsidian drag us to Sin City – will their **RPG sequel** leave Bethesda's in the desert?

**MASSIVE REVEAL!**

### CRYSIS 2

**Massive reveal!** The sequel to one of the PC's greatest shooters finally emerges!



### WHERE HAVE THEY GONE?

The PC projects lost down the back of the sofa - from *Carmageddon 4* to *Van Buren* and *The Crossing* and *Dungeon Keeper 3*. What became of them?



### DRAGON AGE REVISITED!

BioWare's Ray Muzyka talks candidly about his epic RPG – where it went right, where it went wrong, and where it's about to go...

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